UP AGAINST IT

VARICK VANARDY

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LADY OF THE NIGHT WIND
THE TWO-FACED MAN
THE GIRL BY THE ROADSIDE
SOMETHING DOING
UP AGAINST IT

"So! It was you!" he said. "You have a heavy hand, Miss Maitland."

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By

VARICK VANARDY

Author of
"The Lady of the Night Wind," "The Two-Faced Man," "Something Doing," "The Girl by the Roadside," etc.

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To

KINSLEY VAN RENSSELAER DEY

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UP AGAINST IT

CHAPTER I

A Critical Moment

Dan Randall shoved his chair slowly back from the table, gripping the edge of it tightly between his fingers as he did so. His face had gone white, his jaws were set, and his eyes were hard. They had glittered with the utter cold of restrained anger since the last half hour. The sensations produced by the extremes of heat and cold are much the same, although their manifestations are different. It was the latter that affected Randall, at that directors' meeting.

There were eight others present around the big table of solid oak. He was the ninth. One of the eight had betrayed him, and had been betraying him, systematically and methodically, for weeks and months; had betrayed his friendship, his trust, his confidence. The other seven had followed meekly (or purposefully, it did not matter) in the wake of Ace Wadleigh—his friend. His friend!

It had been hard for Randall to believe.

The full realization of the treachery of which he was the victim had come slowly. It had all

seemed so incredible, so impossible, at the beginning of present developments.

He had refused to credit his own perceptions, at first. Then, bit by bit, and minute by minute, the conviction had grown upon him until the point of finality was reached when the votes of the directors had been cast with brutal frankness.

Randall was ousted from the board, shorn of his power, deprived of every atom of influence—cast out.

And the railroad was his, more than anybody's. His brains had conceived it, his ability had established it, his money had financed it; and now he was thrown out with all the ruthlessness that is shown to a drunken bum who has spent his last cent across a bar and is turned into the street because of it. . . . Only, Dan Randall had not expended all of his resources; not yet. He knew, even as he rose slowly from his chair at the end of the table, gripping it, that these men would find out presently, and to their cost, that he had not. But he did not choose to tell them so; not just then.

The white heat of instant anger is as nothing to the cold rage that is the result of contemplated injustice remorselessly dealt out. Your true gentleman is one who practices graciousness, and exacts it; one who is loyal, and who demands loyalty; one who is grateful and considerate, and who believes in the gratitude and the consideration of others. When one who is born and bred with such principles confronts the moment which outrages all of them at once, just rage, bitter savagery, remorseless purpose are the immediate consequences.

Randall's eyes sought the gaze of Boniface Wad-

leigh, which met his own from the opposite end of the table. He ignored the other men. They did not count, save as their votes just cast, had counted. But the purpose which their votes had expressed was concentrated in the cold, almost expressionless eyes of Wadleigh. There was no exaltation in them; no evidence of the triumph he had won by those votes. They were just coldly determined. And Wadleigh's face was always a mask. His pallor was natural, although it was more pronounced than usual at that moment. His strong, handsome, patrician features were determined in their utter calmness. He offered no apology, manifested no regret, spoke no word, when Randall arose to confront him.

For a moment Randall stood quite still, without speaking. He was loosing his grip on the table-edge in order to get one upon himself. When he did speak it was in a low tone, and without the expression of an emotion; calmly and clearly. He said:

"It has been moved and seconded that we now adjourn, subject to the call of the new president just elected. Those in favor will signify it by saying aye. . . . It is so ordered. . . . Gentlemen, keep your places. It will not be well for any of you to attempt to leave this room just yet. Mr. Wadleigh would not be entirely safe from me. With the restraining influence of your presence, he is quite so. For the remainder of what I have to say, Wadleigh, *I* will address you. The others who are here, while competent witnesses, possess no other attribute of manhood which is perceptible, and therefore may be ignored. . . . They have

done as they were told to do. . . . But, you——!" Randall shrugged slightly, but he did not smile. The occasion was not one for smiling.

"I have been the president of the M. and J. railway company since its inception, until to-day. Now I am ousted from that position and you are elected in my place. The position of treasurer, formerly held by you, is now filled by Ellery Cuthbert, who is present. I have been robbed, systematically and deliberately, and you, Wadleigh, are the thief. It is a hard word, I know, but no other one fits the occasion. You have picked my pockets with this 'mob' around you to aid you in the act. You have climbed in at the second story window of my confidence while I was sleeping, drugged to insensibility by my faith in you. You have garroted me from a hidden doorway while I stood with my back turned, looking at the lights across the street of my ambition. You are worse than the thief, the pickpocket, and the footpad, because you added to them the facilities and the persuasiveness of a confidence-man. My utter amazement at what has happened, explains my calmness. I am benumbed.

"But my intelligence is active, and it shall not cease to be on the alert, henceforth. You shall be made to pay, Wadleigh, cent per cent. Consider well that statement when I have gone away. . . .

"At the stockholders' meeting which immediately preceded this directors' meeting, your method and manner of voting the stock which rightfully is mine, should have enlightened me. But it did not. It is as well, perhaps, that I do not understand, yet, how you acquired that power. I

cannot permit myself to think that Miss Maitland knew to what use you would put it when she was persuaded to confer it upon you, in my absence. But I will know all about that circumstance, later. So much for that, Wadleigh. These puppets of yours do not understand me. But you do. . . .

"So far as I am personally concerned, the M. and J. railroad company ceases to exist with this hour. You have it all—you and your stalagmites; for it is the ooze that has dripped from you that has created them. . . . You believe, too, that you have me broke, and helpless. Perhaps you have. Time will answer that. But, whether it is so or not, what you have done to-day, Wadleigh, spells Ruin. R-u-i-n. Think that over, too, for I do not refer to myself, but to you.

"Now, to the business aspect of the situation. There is one item which you have not taken into account. You would have acted with less precipitancy had you done so. You wouldn't have thrown me down quite so hard. I refer to the Lantowa cut-off, between Magician and Janver. That is mine. Every inch of that right of way belongs to me and stands in my name, the deeds and patents thereto being duly and legally recorded. You had forgotten that, hadn't you? or rather, you did not remember it, in your haste to rob me. But it is mine, and this Dominion of Canada has recognized my title to it. . . . It startles you, doesn't it?"

Ace Wadleigh bent forward in his chair and stretched out one hand toward a package of papers on the table in front of him; but his muscles re-

laxed and the hand was withdrawn ere it had touched the papers, and Wadleigh resumed his former position, a slow smile twitching at the corners of his mouth.

He spoke for the first time, for until then he had not betrayed by any other sign than the cold gleam in his eyes, that he had heard the words addressed to him.

"You will find that nothing has been forgotten," he said. His face might have been hewn from marble in its utter coldness and calmness. "And now, since you are no longer one of us, and because it is my duty to preside at a meeting of the newly-elected directors of the Manitoba & Juneau Railroad Company, I must request that you leave the room."

Randall did not reply.

During a moment of tense silence he stared into Wadleigh's eyes, and the gaze was returned without a flicker or an evidence of flinching.

Then Randall stepped away from the end of the table, crossed to his own roll-top desk, the top of which was thrown back, and began with deliberation to dismantle the pigeon-holes of their contents. After a moment he turned and drew his swivel-chair toward him from the end of the director's table, and seated himself upon it, once more giving his attention to his desk. He entirely ignored the presence of others in the room, and there was no haste in his movements as he worked. But there was a mirror which hung against the wall just above his desk, and from time to time he glanced toward it, and thus he saw Wadleigh nod significantly to Cuthbert, the newly-elected treas-

urer of the corporation. Cuthbert rose in his place at the table.

"Mr. President," he said, "I move that the board of directors of the Manitoba & Juneau Railroad Company be now convened, and that if there is any person present who is not a member of that board, he be requested to leave the room." He hesitated an instant, and then added, with a slight thrust forward of his chin: "And I suggest that in case of the failure or refusal of such a person to leave this room upon request, he be ejected."

There was a moment of silence. The directors waited; Randall continued with his occupation, imperturbably. The strain of the moment was intense. Then Wadleigh spoke.

"You heard, Randall?" he said.

Randall made no reply. He bent forward over his desk and pulled out one of the smaller drawers beneath the pigeon-holes; and what he did then was as if in the regular course of clearing out the desk. He lifted a Colt automatic from the interior of that small drawer, held it in his hands for a moment while he examined it, and then dropped it negligently into his coat pocket.

The mirror over his desk told him that the significance of his act had not passed unnoticed. Uneasy glances were shot from man to man around the directors' table. Only Wadleigh appeared to be unimpressed. He left his chair and approached Randall—and the latter man sat very still indeed while he waited. Wadleigh stopped at the end of the desk.

"Will you go out, peacefully, Randall?" he asked.

"Yes; when I have finished with what I have to do, here," was the slow reply. Then he leaned back in his chair and whirled it slowly until he faced the new president of the railroad company, adding: "I will not go, under any circumstances, until then."

"There are eight of us here, Dan," Wadleigh said, with meaning. Randall took the gun from his pocket, looked upon it meditatively for a moment, and returned it.

"That happens to be the precise number of pellets in this pill-box," he said, and turned back toward the desk again.

"Would you use that?"

"I shall protect myself—and my property and interest—to the last ditch," was the quiet reply. He spoke without turning his head.

One of the directors, Taggart by name, who had been lumber-jack, fur-trader, and a hard-rock man in his career, but who had become a successful contractor in later years, sprang to his feet.

"You're not the only man who's got a gun on him, Randall," he called out, savagely. "I guess we've all got at least one. Here's mine right here in my hand, and it's pointing plumb at you, too. Now you climb up outa that chair and chase yourself through that door, mister, and if you wiggle a finger toward that pocket——"

"Sit down, Ben!" Wadleigh interrupted, sharply. "None of that. It doesn't pay. Sit down, I say, and put that gun in your pocket. Let him finish what he is doing. It won't take long, and there's plenty of time."

Randall waited until Taggart had obeyed the

request of Wadleigh. Then he pulled down the desk-top, snapped the lock, and turned his chair slowly around until he faced them all.

"If one of you will open that door into the hall so I can roll this desk out of the room, I won't trouble you any farther," he said, mildly.

"That desk is the property of the company," Wadleigh remarked. "It cannot leave the room."

"On the contrary, it is my personal property, and it goes out with me, Ace."

Randall stood upon his feet, facing them. His right hand again sought his coat pocket, and was withdrawn with the automatic in its grasp. He knew the men who were gathered around that directors' table. He knew, also, that half measures would not "go" with them.

All of them save Wadleigh started to their feet, and more than one hand moved toward a concealed weapon; and Randall raised his pistol so that it flickered from man to man, briefly. Without exception their hands dropped again to their sides, their arms hanging straight downward. Wadleigh alone had made no motions, and appeared unimpressed. But Ace Wadleigh bore the reputation of never changing countenance and of never being in haste, under any circumstance.

"I have won some recognition among you for markmanship," Randall said, coolly, "but I don't think that any of us want an exhibition of it here. It would be the height of absurdity. But, I shall not put away this gun now until I and my desk are safely outside of that door, and I shall not hesitate to resent, with emphasis, the slightest sign of in-

terference. If you force me to extremes—well, in that case it will be a matter of indifference to me who gets hurt."

The moment was critical.

The slightest ill-advised movement by any man in that room would have precipitated matters instantly. Randall knew it; the men who faced him realized it. Wadleigh alone seemed to be pondering upon something that was quite foreign to the menacing situation. His eyes had left Randall's face and sought the closed and locked desk. There was something inside of it that he wanted, he thought, and he had supposed it would be an easy matter to get it by driving Randall from the room.

But Wadleigh understood perfectly well—perhaps much better than the others, for he had a much more thorough acquaintance with Randall than they had—that the desk could not be opened again inside of that room without bloodshed; and bloodshed was to be avoided at all hazards. So he thought deeply, and swiftly; and evidently he believed that he saw a way by which his desires might be accomplished. He shrugged his shoulders; an emphatic gesture with him who rarely gestured at all.

"Very well," he said. "You and the desk shall leave the room together."

He turned upon his heel and strode toward the door. His hand touched the knob, and clicked it —and at that precise instant somebody rapped against the panel at the opposite side of it.

Had that rapping occurred an instant sooner, before he had touched the door-knob, Wadleigh

might not have responded. As it was, he continued the turn of the knob that he had already begun, and jerked the door open. Then he took a quick step backward, and something very like a gasp of astonishment escaped every man in that room, except Randall, whose back was toward the doorway.

Joyce Maitland, hooded and furred, stood at the threshold.

The glow of the silent cold without was upon her cheeks, the sparkle of the bright sun on the frozen snow banks was in her darkly luminous eyes, and health, vivacity, energy, and courage radiated from her as she took one step forward and paused uncertainly, amazed by the aspect of the tableau she had interrupted. Seven men standing around a huge table facing another man, and that other with a weapon in his right hand, defying them—or menacing them. . . . Which? She did not know. She could not determine.

Randall was the only one there who did not suspect her presence. He had heard the tap at the door, but he had no means of knowing that it was not a prearranged signal anticipated by his companions within the room, and he did not care, just yet, to turn his eyes away from his watchfulness over them. Of the seven who faced him there were at least three who would not hesitate to take advantage of his slightest inattention. He might be shot down without compunction, in that room, with eight reputable witnesses to testify to how it had happened (?)—and he with a gun in his own hand.

Joyce Maitland's first act of greeting when the

door opened had been a nod to Wadleigh, brightly bestowed; then her glances flew to the scene she had interrupted. The glow in her cheeks did not perceptibly lessen, but her eyes widened and her lips lost their smile, as if she had some small conception of what was going on. Then her ready wit saved the situation.

"I hope I'm not intruding," she said; and Randall spun around on his heel and dropped the weapon into his pocket as he faced her. The men at the table sank upon their respective chairs. Wadleigh stepped backward farther into the room, and Joyce followed him. The door remained wide open. Then she added: "Is it a rehearsal of some sort?"

"Dan was giving us a lesson in the art of preparedness; that is all," Wadleigh replied. "He was demonstrating to us the facility with which a man may draw, and perhaps use, a gun, in an extremity. He is moving his desk into another room and my part of the work was to open the door. . . . Taggart, if you and Cuthbert will lend a hand I think we will roll the desk outside, now. . . . You see, Joyce, Dan has an idea that there are too many interruptions in this big office, so he's going to flock by himself for a while."

Joyce Maitland's eyes rested for a moment upon Randall's face. He made her no attempted apology for the scene she had interrupted; he offered no lame explanation. He did not speak at all, nor did he look at her again after that first glance of astonishment; and she was suddenly conscious there had been no smile of pleasure from him at seeing her, no welcoming expression in his eyes.

Taggart and Cuthbert, with the aid of Crosby, the newly-elected secretary of the company, pushed the desk into the hall. Another shoved out the chair that belonged to it. Then Randall put on his fur coat and cap and the laced boots that were made to fit over his house-shoes. He turned toward the door without another glance toward Joyce.

But she stepped quickly to his side and rested her hand upon his arm.

"What is it, Dan? What has happened? What is happening?" she asked, putting one question after another, quickly.

He paused with his hand on the knob of the door, which had been closed when the desk and chair were moved out of the room. There was no harshness in his manner or his words as he answered her; but there was distance, even though there was the glimmer of a smile—not a pleasant one, quite—in his eyes, as he spoke in reply.

"I am moving out," he said, "out of the company I have been in. And that term applies to persons as well as to a railroad. My own stock has been voted against me to-day, and you should understand why that is so, better than I could tell you."

Then he opened the door, passed into the hallway, and closed it after him.

CHAPTER II

A Pair of Schemers

Dan Randall made a grievous mistake when he went out of that room and left Miss Maitland no choice but to hear and to accept the explanations that were made to her by Ace Wadleigh and his companions.

"It is just a foolish little flash of temper on the part of Dan," Wadleigh told her, soothingly, while he brought forward a chair. "And that last remark of his before he went out was an exhibition of it. You see, Joyce, he permitted himself to get angry about a misconception of his own, in regard to the Lantowa cut-off; that eight and a half miles of road that we are going to build over Magician pass. You know about that, don't you?"

"I'm afraid that I don't know about it, Ace," she replied. "I have never heard of it."

"There isn't very much to know, when all is said. The point is that the distance from Janver, where we now are, to Magician, is fifty-six miles by the present route; but Dan and I put our heads together and figured on the pass over Lantowa mountain. We decided that it was practicable, and now the thing is in shape to reduce that fifty-six miles to eight and a half. Then——"

Joyce was palpably impatient, and she manifested it that moment by interrupting him. He

had been talking rapidly with the too evident desire to direct her thoughts away from the scene she had just witnessed, while as a matter of fact she was paying no attention to what he was saying.

"You quarreled," she broke in upon him. It was both a question and an assertion.

"Well, yes. That is, Dan quarreled. I didn't. These gentlemen here, and you know every one of them, will assure you that Dan did all the quarreling, and that I didn't do any of it."

"Never mind that. What was the quarrel about?"

"Joyce, when men undertake a great enterprise such as this one is, it is not possible in all things to rely upon the judgment of one man, or even two, and so they institute a board of directors. The persons who are in this room now—including yourself—constitute that board. Wait a moment until I finish explaining. Dan became angry at the meeting, and resigned, not only from the board, but from the presidency of the company. We didn't like the manner in which he resigned, and to teach him a lesson, we accepted the situation. When he saw that he had resigned himself out of the board of directors, and the presidency of the company, too, and that we had taken him at his word, he was just plain mad; and then, when you were elected to the board in his place, and I was chosen as the president, Dan pulled his gun, and threatened us all. And now, if you will take that chair beside Mr. Cuthbert, I'll call the meeting to order and we will proceed. If you require any further explanations, they can be made afterward."

She hesitated for the briefest instant. Then she moved toward the door.

"No," she said. "You can proceed without me. And I don't think that I care to be a member of your board. I would be an obstacle rather than a help to you."

She stepped swiftly toward the door, but Wadleigh had watched her narrowly during the entire interview, and he reached it first without appearing to be in haste. Indeed, he approached it so naturally that he gave merely the impression of an intention to open it for her to pass through. Still, he managed to obstruct her way. He had no desire that she should find opportunity just then for an interview with Dan Randall.

But that was just what she did want, although it did not occur to her that Wadleigh was endeavoring to prevent one. She saw only his wish to have her remain; and so she stepped around him and past him to the door, smiling as she did so, and opened it; and as that was done, Wadleigh breathed a sigh of relief.

Randall was not there.

The wide corridor was untenanted save by the desk that had been rolled into it from the office of the M. & J. R. R. office. That was there, backed up against the wall at the opposite end of the corridor. Randall had gone.

Wadleigh held out both hands, palms upward, and shrugged expressively—for he could be as expressive as another when occasion called for it. Just then he felt that it did. The girl who stood beside him was the most important factor in his entire scheme of successful personal aggrandize-

ment. He well knew that she could not be forced, nor urged, nor led, nor coaxed, into the performance of any act; she could only be persuaded—and he relied upon his own powers of persuasion. Wadleigh possessed unbounded faith in his own diplomacy.

"Dan has gone away," he said, before she could speak. "I suppose the sight of you, Joyce, cooled him off a bit."

Three of the seven directors remaining in the room had followed as far as the doorway, and Wadleigh turned quickly toward them. They could see that he closed one eye in a long wink, when he continued to speak, and he went on without an apparent interruption:

"He'll return presently, and be sorry for it all." He swung around again so that he faced Joyce. "And when he comes back, we will reinstate him on the board, and I will step down and out of the presidency, too, so that he can have his old place."

"Surest thing you know, Miss Maitland," said Ben Taggart in his gruff voice, and with a big laugh. "We'll put him right where he belongs. Don't you get any wrong idee about that."

"Certainly we will," Wadleigh said, echoing the laugh. "Ben, you and Cuthbert roll his desk back into the room, in its old place; and when Dan comes in we'll act just as though this thing hadn't happened at all." He turned toward Joyce again. "I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll re-elect him president and director before he gets back. Eh, Ben? That will settle all that."

"You bet we will," was the chuckling reply from the ex-lumberjack.

Joyce Maitland extended both her hands toward Wadleigh, and he grasped them, perhaps with more enthusiasm than the occasion called for.

"That is so like you, Ace," she said, simply. "You are always thoughtful and considerate for others; and really, I shudder when I think what it would mean to Dan if anything happened to upset his plans. He has built so much upon them. Only last evening——" she paused abruptly; and Wadleigh was far too wise to ask her to continue. Besides, he was a far-seeing person, and he already knew about the interview to which she referred. He had been an unsuspected eavesdropper to it, himself, and it was because he *did* know about it, that the directors' meeting and the betrayal resulting from it had been sprung upon Dan Randall that morning.

He conducted her to the head of the stairs, for the building which contained the executive offices of the M. & J. R. R. Co. was only two stories high and was made of lumber. It fronted upon the "square," now deep with snow. Every building of any pretention in Janver looked out upon the "square."

Joyce nodded brightly to him as she descended the stairs, and he turned leisurely away; but the next instant he sprang forward toward the office, passed inside, and closed the door.

"Scatter, now, every one of you but Cuthbert," he said. "I want him here with me. Get out on the square. I don't want Joyce Maitland to have an opportunity to talk with Randall. After to-day it won't make any difference, but for to-day it must be prevented. If they meet, and talk, interrupt

them. I don't care a hang how you do it. And don't let him come back here, either, until I have gone through that desk, and shoved it back into the hall."

Taggart was the first man to seize his furs and go; the others followed, one by one; but Wadleigh paid no further attention to them. He had given his orders, and he expected to be obeyed. He was already busy with the lock of Randall's desk, seeking to open it. But he was not wasting time by trying keys. He had done that before. A lumberman's two-bitted axe, which stood in one corner of the room, was the key he used, and he forced one of the edges of it beneath the lid of the desk and pried upward.

The others had gone and Cuthbert was standing beside him when the hook-bolt of the lock snapped and he threw the roll-top back into the desk.

All of Wadleigh's powers of self-repression were needed then, for staring up at the two men from the interior of the desk where Randall had left it, was a sheet of paper upon which, in printed letters, he had inscribed:

Thieves will break open this desk.
The thieves will not find what they seek.

Cuthbert's little eyes glittered savagely and he swore softly to himself; a habit of his when he was unduly roused. It betokened a dangerous mood on his part, too. Wadleigh said nothing. He shut down the lid of the desk again, without searching it.

"There is no use," he said, resignedly. "Never mind the desk. Let it stay where it is. Randall

won't come back after it; or, if he does—we'll see about it when the time comes. I made just one mistake at that meeting, Cuthbert. I should have told Ben Taggart to shoot when he had the drop on Randall."

"Yes; that would have been fine, wouldn't it, with Miss Maitland blowin' in here two minutes afterward? But *you'd*-a slipped out of it, Ace, with your smooth ways. What are you going to do now?"

Wadleigh did not reply. Instead he crossed to a window of the room and with both hands thrust deeply into his pocket, stood for a time staring out of it; and Cuthbert waited. He had very little personal liking for Wadleigh, but he thoroughly respected the powers of intellect which the new president of the railroad possessed.

After a moment or two Wadleigh spoke without turning. The subject of his remark was apparently an extrinsic one. He demanded:

"What has become of that bum Gaffney? Where is he?"

"Drunk. He's dead to the world. He was sound asleep and snoring, two hours ago, down at Thompson's, and Lightfoot was keeping watch. He's safe enough."

"All the same we must get him out of the town—now. Right away, too. I wouldn't trust him, Cuthbert, as far as I could throw a bull by the tail. We've got to get him away from Janver before another day. That's all there is about that."

"I'd like to see you do it—or anybody else, either," Cuthbert replied with a derisive chuckle. "The road is blocked both ways from here, and

has been, for three days, as you know. If it wasn't for that you couldn't have kept him here at all, nor have done with him what you did do. And you know that, too."

"All the same we've got to get rid of him."

"Well, then, you'll have to shoot him, or poison him, or knock him on the head, or put him outside to-night and let him freeze—and I don't fancy that any of them ways would be surpassingly healthy —for the fellow that done it."

"There's another thing that must be done, too. Those deeds must be taken to Magician, and recorded."

"All right, you take 'em. I ain't seen any air-o-planes flying around Janver; not lately. And I wouldn't know how to run it if I should happen to trip over one on the Square. And there ain't no other way to get to Magician till the plows work their way through Rickett's canyon; not that I know of."

"How about the pass? Couldn't it be done?"

"*I* couldn't do it. It's sixty below up there, right now."

"This affair has come to a head too soon."

"Well, whose fault is that?"

"Look here, Cuthbert, it's not yours, nor mine, nor any person's. It's the fault of circumstance. But it must be met just the same, and we've got to meet it. Those deeds that Gaffney prepared for us are ready to record. They've got to be recorded, and that's all there is about that. Somebody has got to go to Magician, over the pass, and take Gaffney with him."

"What the——"

"And lose him on the way; see? There isn't a better place on the footstool to lose a man and let him perish, than on that pass between here and Magician. Who can do it?

"Search me. I know that I won't. Ben might. That's his long suit, and he's had more experience at that sort-a thing than all the rest of us put together. And besides——"

"And besides, you and Ben and I are the only ones of the bunch who know the truth about those deeds. Randall thought I had forgotten them. He'll find out whether I forgot them or not. I had them right there on the table in front of me when he threw his ownership of that right-of-way at me; and I come near to showing them to him, and bluffing it out. But I wanted those other deeds of his, first. They'll be the old ones when these are recorded, but the possession of them *with* these, is rather important. They were in that desk of his, too, and I happened to know it. Say, Cuthbert, could Lightfoot make the pass, do you think?"

"Yes. Lightfoot could make the pass if anybody could, but he could not do the rest of it, Ace."

"Lightfoot and Ben Taggart could make it, and take Gaffney with them—and lose him up there."

Cuthbert leaned forward half across the big directors' table, towards his companion.

"Ace, you know as well as I do that Ben Taggart ain't the man to do that business in Magician," he said, impressively. "He'd ball it up and sprag it, somehow, when he got over there and faced that slick article of a court clerk who'd be askin' him a lot of questions. Sam Sutherland

and Dan Randall are as thick as flies when they get together, and the minute that Sutherland sees Dan's name signed to those deeds he's going to be suspicious, if there's the least cause for suspicion. He's bound to be so, anyhow, so long as you ain't got them *old* deeds to Randall, *to* show him. He'd never suspect a thing if you had *them*. But we ain't got 'em. Randall's got 'em. That's what. I didn't suppose they were in that desk, or *I'd* never let him get away with it. You hear me! I reckon when you decided to let him go, and made Ben put up his gun, you thought you had schemed out another plan to get 'em—but where are they? No, sir-ree! If anybody tries that fool trip across the pass to Magician, *you're the one that's got to do it.*"

Wadleigh straightened himself, threw back his head, unconsciously squared his wide shoulders, and replied:

"Then I will do it. That settles it, Cuthbert. I'll get there, too. Go out, now, and find Ben, and send him here to me. Then wake up Gaffney and take him and Lightfoot to Ben's shack, down by the tracks. It's the safest place. You tell Lightfoot what he's got to do—to take me over the pass. He is the only man within five hundred miles of here who's got any dogs, and we must go provisioned for emergencies—anyhow for three or four days. Nobody knows what the conditions are, over that pass. Don't say anything to Lightfoot about Gaffney. I'll attend to that. We'll make it appear, afterward, that Gaffney insisted upon going, and the fewer that know the real truth about it the better. Now find Ben and send him

here. We'll meet you down at his shack in an hour. Tell Lightfoot that we'll make the start as soon as he's ready, and that he gets a hundred dollars for the job.''

Cuthbert hesitated for a moment. Then he turned away toward the door; but he grumbled audibly and angrily as he went: ''Well, maybe you can do it in the night, for it will be night before you get to the top of the pass, 'cause there's a moon; but all the same *I* wouldn't do it, not for the whole damned railroad; not me!!'' Then he passed outside and closed the door after him.

A moment later, it opened and closed again, and Wadleigh, thinking that Cuthbert had returned, raised his head and turned toward the door.

For once in his eventful life Ace Wadleigh was startled out of his composure.

Dan Randall stood in the middle of the room, facing him.

CHAPTER III

The Fake Package

Ace Wadleigh possessed all of the courage that should have belonged to a thoroughly good man—which he was very far indeed from being. His ready acceptance of the dangers of the journey over the Lantowa mountains was sufficient proof of that.

He had seated himself at his own desk when Randall entered the room. He remained seated when he discovered who was there, although he believed that he courted serious injury, if not actual death, by doing so. He understood, perfectly well, that he was no match for Randall, physically. His own strength was greater than most men's, but Randall's approached the phenomenal.

"You have returned," Wadleigh said, coolly. "Why?"

"I came merely to satisfy myself that you had broken open my desk, to rob it! . . . My God, Ace, how is it that you can become, all in a moment it seems to me, such an unmitigated cur, and scoundrel—and thief? An hour ago I would not have believed it, and I'd have come near to killing any man who dared to suggest it. . . .

"I see that you choose not to reply; also that you elect to sit very still indeed upon that chair.

Probably you realize that I am keeping my hands from your throat only by a mighty effort. You had best sit quiet. A single move by you might make me forget myself. And you were my friend! You! . . . What did you tell Joyce? . . .

"You'd better answer me, Ace, when I speak to you; and reply to questions that I ask. If you don't, I'll make you—so answer that one."

"You have not seen her since she went out?" Wadleigh replied, with a slight smile.

"No. I have been in the room across the hall, waiting till you were alone."

"And you have not heard——"

"I'm neither a spy, nor an eavesdropper, Ace, What did you tell her?"

"I told her that you had resigned; that's all. You might have heard—you must have heard—the conversation. That part of it, at least, took place in the hall. She was not surprised. You weren't very far wrong when you told her that she should know, better than you, why your own stock was voted against you. It isn't your own stock, and it never was your own stock, and Joyce Maitland did not mean that it ever would be yours from the moment when you had it put in her name. Now you've got the facts, and if you don't like my version of them, go and ask her—only I don't think you'll get very much that is satisfactory to you, from her, now."

Randall's fingers opened and closed, and opened again. He took half a step forward toward his tormentor, and withdrew it again.

"It's a wonder that I don't kill you, Wadleigh," he said, shortly; and if the truth be told

Wadleigh thought so, too. But he was a man who was unafraid. That was his dominating power: courage.

"Go to Joyce and ask her about it, if you like," Wadleigh bluffed. "She won't hesitate to laugh at you—not now, that the mask is off. A man who is living under a false name."

Randall interrupted him with a gesture. He did not speak, but the gesture was sufficient. Wadleigh understood it was safer to stop. He realized that he was hovering above a powder magazine with a lighted match in his hand.

"I'll end by hurting you if you continue in that strain," Randall said, wearily, and he passed a hand across his brow as if to brush something aside from his vision. "I'm trying to control myself so that I won't; but you must not taunt me. You never in your life faced the danger that confronts you now, Ace. If this tension on my temper should snap, you'd be in eternity in two minutes. I'd crush the breath out of your body with these;" and he held out his hands with the fingers of them bent and strained and threatening. "You know it, too, so be careful. I'm pleading for myself more than for you—for I don't want to kill you, Wadleigh. . . . I have killed one man, and that is enough. I know how it feels, afterward. . . . *Have you told her, that?*" He bent forward, slightly, awaiting the relpy; and Wadleigh hesitated. He had not told her, but he had refrained from it only because he was afraid to do so, believing that Joyce would not be able to hide her knowledge of it; but he wanted Randall to believe that Joyce knew.

"No; I did not tell her—but, she knows," he lied, slowly; or believed that he did so. He was wary and watchful, more than half expecting an attack when he said that. But it did not come, and he went on, for he could see that although Randall's fingers were twitching, that now the man was thinking more of Joyce than of him. "She asked me about it. The mysteries concerning your past troubled her. She pretended that they did not, but they did. She wrote letters. I don't know where, or to whom; but she wrote. And she received answers. Joyce has discovered that Dan Randall spells only two of your names, and she knows what the last one is. She knows that you are the one who—— No; I won't say it. She knows why you dropped your last name, and why you came out into this country. Do you want me to go on?" Wadleigh was lying glibly enough, now.

"Yes."

"She had letters, and files of old newspapers, sent to her, and when she had mastered the contents, she asked me about them. What could I say? She had the proofs. What was the good of my denying it? Any? I don't see it, if there was."

"How long has she known about it? Tell me that."

"How should I know? It has been some time, I fancy. She sent for me and asked me about it the day you went away, two weeks ago. Nobody expected that *you* could get back here, after the snow came. Nobody could have done it, but you. I don't know how *you* did it. Any other man

would have perished in that storm, yesterday, but you came through it."

"And it never occurred to you that I would do that, did it?" Randall exclaimed. "You didn't want me here. You thought I was in Carrolton, and that I would be detained there indefinitely. You banked upon my being absent when you induced the other seven thieves to join you here to hold that snap meeting of stockholders and directors, to put me out of business. And to think that I came because I believed you would want me, needed me! God, Wadleigh, it's a wonder that I *don't* kill you!!"

Wadleigh left his chair and stood upon his feet. He knew that the paroxysm of Randall's wrath was past now, and that he was comparatively safe from his former chum. He took the advantage of a coward, knowing that his own weakness was his strength.

"Drop that, Dan," he said. "I'm not afraid of you, or of your heroics. There won't be any killing done here to-day. You're out of the company now, and we don't want to have anything more to do with you. The stock you have called yours never stood in your name, and you can't prove that you ever had any right to it. Try it if you believe you can."

"Maybe I will try it, Ace, but not in exactly the way you think I will."

"Try it, and be damned. You talked with Joyce Maitland last night after you got back here, over the telephone. Oh, I know all about it. It's a pity you didn't go to see her instead of calling her up on the 'phone. You'd have been spared

some of the things that have happened to-day—maybe; anyhow, you'd have known about them a little sooner. Joyce knows who you are, and what you are, and she is through with you. You could see that in her manner here, to-day, couldn't you? Now, what do you want? What did you come sneaking back here for, after you have been put out?"

Randall did an unexpected thing, then. It surprised even himself, he was so cool about it.

But Wadleigh had gone a step too far; and Randall knew that his own insane rage was past, and that he could trust himself not to kill. He thrust out his hands and seized Wadleigh's arms, holding them rigidly. Then he drew them together until he could clasp both of the new president's wrists with the fingers of one of his own hands. He held them so, and Wadleigh knew how utterly futile it would be to struggle. For a moment the man came very near indeed to being afraid, although he seemed to understand, as Randall understood, that he would not be killed.

"I came here to make certain that you would break into my desk," Randall said, speaking slowly. "There could be only one reason why you would do that—those deeds of mine."

"Well, what of it?" Wadleigh was still bluffing.

"You knew when I left here for Carrolton that I went to Magician first because I wanted to get those deeds. *They* are in my name, anyhow; in Dan Randall's name."

"The Dominion of Canada doesn't take kindly to people who travel under fic——"

"Shut up. You knew that I brought them back

with me last night. You knew that I had not put them into the safe. You decided that they were in my desk, and you wanted them. But why? They have been recorded. What good would they have done you, if you had secured them?''

''I haven't said that I wanted them. You're saying it. I don't want them—as you will find out if you live long enough. Let go of me, will you?''

''I will when I have finished with you—and I'm pretty nearly through. Come over here.''

With his one hand and despite the known strength of Ace Wadleigh, Randall pulled him easily across the room toward a row of hooks fastened to the wall. A braided leather quirt hung from one of them. Randall took it down.

''Ace,'' he said, with deliberate calmness, ''I'm going to give you the worst thrashing you ever had in your life—with this quirt. See it?'' He raised it and struck Wadleigh across the thighs. ''Feel it?''

Ace did attempt to struggle, then, but he could not escape, and the cruel quirt fell again and again, until the victim's trousers were slashed and rent, and the blood from the beaten man's legs showed upon them in several places. The lash was heavy and was made of braided rawhide. The hand of the man who wielded it was heavier still.

Nevertheless, Wadleigh uttered no sound of lamentation. He was game, even under the stress of that awful punishment. Most men would have broken down and confessed under such a terrible whipping, but he did not. Many would have cried

out that they had lied, and stolen, and misrepresented, and deceived, but he did not. Another might have admitted that Joyce Maitland was in utter ignorance of every one of the things he had said she knew about, but Wadleigh did not weaken.

But he did struggle, and strike with his hands upon the iron-like arms of Dan Randall. He could not reach Randall's face. And the struggling and the scuffling over the bare floor made considerable noise, so that Randall did not know that the door opened and that Ben Taggart strode into the room, and halted, amazed by what he saw.

And Wadleigh pretended not to know. He did not want to do anything to warn Randall of what he knew must happen in a moment, for Ben Taggart was big and brutal, and was almost as strong in his muscles as Randall.

The former lumberjack paused only an instant. Then he went swiftly forward with the silent tread of a panther, and when Randall drew back the quirt for another blow, he seized it and tore it from Randall's grasp, turned it butt foremost, and struck heavily, even as Dan was in the act of turning to discover what had interfered with him.

The butt end of the heavy quirt fell on the side of Randall's head just above his left ear, and he dropped to the floor like an ox that is struck by a maul.

Wadleigh, in a frenzy of fury, because for once in his life he was quite beside himself, sprang for the quirt which Taggart threw aside as soon as Randall fell, and he raised it to give back upon the body of the insensible man the beating he had received; but Taggart tore it from his grasp. Then

he tossed it to the floor beside the prostrate form of Dan Randall.

"That'll do," he said harshly. "You can save all that for another time. There ain't any to spare, now. You'd better change your clothes and wash up, Ace. You certainly do look some rumpled. Lightfoot is waiting' for us, and we've brought that bum to his senses. The sled is packed and the dogs harnessed. I'm goin' with you, so get a move on."

Instead of doing as directed, Wadleigh dropped upon his knees beside Dan. He thrust one hand down inside of the leather waistcoat that Randall wore, and pulled it out again containing a thickly filled package that was tied with tape.

Feverishly, for him, he loosened the tape and ran the contents of the package between his fingers.

"The deeds!" he exclaimed. "Jove! this is luck."

He started to his feet, forgetful of the lashing he had received, and darted across the room to his own desk, where, with skill and rapidity, he made up a second package of the same size and thickness as the one he had stolen, using papers of his own which were of little or no account, and, in fact, giving small heed to what they were.

"What the blazes are you up to now?" demanded Taggart, who was watching him.

"Up to, man? I've got the original deeds; don't you understand? They are made to Randall, from the original conveyors. All the deeds that *we've* got are forged. Sutherland, who has to record them, is Dan's friend. He'd suspect if

we didn't have these; but when we show him all of *these,* and tell him the story that I will tell him, he'll record them without a murmur; and once recorded——"

"But what are you doing now, that's what I want to know?"

"I'm putting this fake package into his pocket in place of the package of deeds. It is the same size and shape, and is tied in the same wrapper, and with the same tape. The deeds have been recorded and it isn't likely that he'll undo that package again for weeks to come. He'll probably take it to Judge Grayson and ask him to keep it in his safe for him. That thrashing was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me. Come on, now, for I want to get out of here. You say that Lightfoot is ready?"

"Yes; and so's the bum."

"And you are going, too?"

"Surest thing you know, Ace. You'd never get through without me; and that Gaffney, when he's sober, is tougher than a pine knot. He might turn on you. But he ain't likely to do much turning if I'm along," he added, significantly.

"Can we make the trip to-night?"

"We'll make it by some time to-morrow, and that'll be time enough," was the grim reply. "That is, we will if we can get through at all. If we're held up by the snows, there's grub enough for us, and we'll make the pass sooner or later. One thing is certain: Nobody else can get to Magician *before* we do."

"All right. You go on down to your shack. I'll slip around to my quarters, and out again by

the back way, after I've made ready for the trip. It'll be cold up there in the pass, to-night. Leave the door open into the hall. Let Randall think what he pleases when he comes to, and finds that I have gone. He'll never know who hit him unless you tell him of it. There isn't a thing here in this joint that I care a fig about, now. I've got all that I need at Carrolton. We're not likely to blow back here for two weeks or more."

"*I* ain't likely to blow back again for two months or more, if anybody should ask you," said Taggart, as they passed together from the office into the wide hall, "but it's a cinch that you'll be knocking at a certain door in this town, just about as soon as Rickett's canyon is dug open. She's a beaut, all right, Ace, and I don't blame you—only I always thought she liked Dan a heap better than you. But maybe I'm wrong."

Wadleigh made no reply to Taggart's remarks. He scarcely paid attention to them. He was thinking rapidly and deeply.

When they had passed beyond the storm-doors to the street which fronted on the Square, Wadleigh gave Taggart a second package which he had taken from his own desk in the office.

"On your way, Ben, leave this at Miss Maitland's door," he said. "If you should happen to see her, just say that I sent it, and that there is no answer; if you do not see her, just leave it. There are things inside of that package which will settle Dan Randall's hash with her, for good."

They parted, going in opposite directions.

CHAPTER IV

Life—and the Right to Live

A moment afterward Joyce Maitland came out of a store at the opposite side of the square and crossed directly toward the office of the railroad company, where she mounted the stairs. It was evident that she had not seen either of the men who had just come out.

She was surprised when she arrived at the top of the stairs to discover that the office door was ajar, and she went rapidly forward to it, and passed inside.

For an instant she stopped, and her hand flew to her bosom when she saw Dan Randall prone upon the floor in front of her, but she did not cry out; she only faltered and then went swiftly forward toward him.

Her first thought was that he was dead, but even as it came to her, he moved.

Then, as she bent forward to assist him, she tripped over the quirt on the floor, and, in recovering, she seized it, intending merely to cast it aside out of the way. At that precise instant Randall sat bolt upright, facing her.

One glance only he gave her, and then he leaped to his feet as if he had not been hurt at all. Like all strong men, when stricken senseless, he recovered

suddenly and completely. He was in full possession of his senses the instant his eyes rested upon Joyce Maitland, although he had been entirely ignorant of her nearness until then; and his first conscious glance had discovered her bending toward him with the ugly quirt, butt foremost, in her grasp, and with her face pale and drawn and frightened, as if in terror of what she had done.

"So; it was you!" he said. "You have a heavy hand, Miss Maitland."

"Why Dan——"

"That quirt is mine, if you please. Give it to me. You might take the notion to do more damage with it."

"Why, Dan! Dan!! What in the world do you mean?" she gasped, falling backward, away from him, in her horror of comprehension of the meaning of his words; but he took two steps toward her and received the quirt from her unresisting grasp. Then he looked around him for a sign of Wadleigh, and she watched him in amazement so utter that it was silent. She could not speak.

"Your new partner has disappeared, Miss Maitland; and now that you know all about me, I think you had better follow him. I have killed one man, you know, and an utter brute like me might even attack a woman. At least you might *think* I would; you're quite capable of it. . . . Oh, you need not look so frightened. I wouldn't really harm you, you know; but I'll tell you one thing. It's this: I don't think I've quite killed Ace Wadleigh to-day, but if I ever hear that you are to be his wife, I will do it. . . . There, now; there! I'm in an ugly mood, and you'd better go while there

is time. If you remain, I might be tempted to tell you how utterly I loved you up to an hour ago—and how entirely I despise you, now. The door is open. . . . Go, please."

She went.

Not a word of protest did she utter as she fled from him through the open doorway and down the stairs, and through the lower hall to the storm doors and into the street, scarcely knowing what she did.

She was conscious only of what she had just seen and heard. She had found Dan Randall prone upon the floor, and he had roused to consciousness to accuse her of striking him down.

As she went on toward her own home, flaming anger began to blaze in her eyes and to heave in her breathing. She was hurt, wounded, angry, mystified, and the mixture of sensations was too much for her, so that when at last she did arrive at her home she went straight to her own room and threw herself upon the bed, and wept.

Back in the railroad office, Randall found Wadleigh's desk open, and upon it was a forgotten single sheet of paper upon which Randall's name, as he always wrote his signature, had been written and rewritten many times. Doubtless it had fallen there while Wadleigh was searching for papers with which to make up the fake package that he had put into Dan's pocket to replace the packet of deeds that he had stolen.

The sight of it brought Randall to his senses—to his saner senses. He knew that Wadleigh could not have written those signatures; but some-

body had done it, and it had been done, in many instances, nearly perfectly.

"Forgery!" he muttered, aloud. "Why!! The cut-off? By Jove!! Those old deeds that Ace wanted!" He felt quickly at his breast, drew out the faked package, breathed a sigh of relief and returned it. Then he thought on: "They're of no value in themselves, really, now that they are recorded; that is—oh, well, I worked altogether too hard to obtain them, to wish to lose them now. . . . But what does this mean? What are they trying to forge, with my name? Deeds? By——"

He stopped right there, stood like a statue for an instant, and then rushed from the building, cramming the sheet of foolscap into one of his pockets as he went. Although he slowed down his pace when he was in the street in order to avoid attracting undue attention to himself, he almost ran, nevertheless, and he did not pause until he was ringing the old-fashioned pull-bell at the door of the house where Boniface Wadleigh lived, and was cared-for, looked-after, and cooked-for by a French-Canadian and wife, whom, as it happened, Randall had recommended to his friend and confidant more than a year before. . . . It had happened when he and Wadleigh, sworn friends and comrades, had gone to Janver together, determined to buy up for "next to nothing" the assets, rolling stock, grades, rights of way, appurtenances, etc., etc., of the very nearly defunct and scarcely begun Manitoba & Juneau Railroad Company.

It is doubtful if, at that time, Wadleigh had clearly understood that Jules Legarde had served Randall as guide and companion in the far north

for almost a year when Randall fled to the "silent places" from an eastern city. He might not have retained the services of Jules and his wife, otherwise. However, it was Jules Legarde who opened the door for Randall when he rang, and Jules, of course, knew nothing of the rupture between his present master and his former employer.

Jules was a true son of the North, with a quarter-strain of Indian blood in his veins. He loved the wild places and the silences, and he longed for them every day of his life, contrasting the call of them day by day with his great love for Yvonne, who had consented to be his wife only on condition that he give up forever the life of a trapper. And Jules loved Dan Randall with a dog-like affection that can be born only of such companionship as they had shared in the wild places. When he saw his former master at the door he expressed his joy at seeing him again, much as a faithful dog might have done.

But his quick perceptions discovered that something was wrong with his beloved "M'sieu."

"I want Wadleigh, Jules. Where is he?" was Randall's abrupt greeting.

"Heem gone, m'sieu. Heem not here. . . . V'ere? Je na sais pas. Heem come by back door; heem go same vay. For sledge, mebby, m'sieu. Heem put on furs. Oui. Thirt', mebby forty minutes ago. Voila!"

For a moment Randall stared, not entirely comprehending. Then, in a flash it came to him that Wadleigh might have fled from the office believing that Randall had been killed.

But would he have flown for such a thing?

Hardly. Wadleigh had never been one to be frightened. What then? The deeds? The sheet of paper containing the forged signatures of Randall? There was something there. It meant something, but what?

He seized Jules by both arms.

"Listen to me, Jules," he said, compelling himself to patient speaking. He realized that Jules' sense of loyalty to his present employer would demand a reason for what he might be asked to do by his former master. "Wadleigh and I have quarreled. He has wronged me. Some day I will explain. Go, now, and find out for me where he has gone, and with whom he has gone. Return quickly. I will wait here. But be quick. I will wait for you in his sitting room."

Randall entered the room which Wadleigh called home, in Janver, and closed the door after him. He stared around him at the confusion of things scattered about the room, and at the clear evidences of a hasty departure. Then he began to pick up one article after another, and examine them, and at last, putting aside his scruples against that sort of spying, and realizing that the end justified the means—and having already discovered enough to know that the end *would* justify his acts—he seated himself upon the chair before Wadleigh's open desk. But even then he swung the chair around until he faced the other way, and made no effort to examine it.

He was still there when Jules announced his return by a timid knock upon the door, half an hour later.

"Heem gone with Lightfoot an' m'sieu Tag-

garrr," he announced without preface. "Heem take stranger, too—a m'sieu Gaffney. Ovair the Lantowa, by the pass, mebby. I do not know dat. If eet ees so, they freeze, mebby. Eet is ver' cold up dere, m'sieu."

Randall started to his feet.

He was a tall man and he towered high above the quarter-breed. He rested his hands heavily upon the shoulders of Jules, and said:

"My friend, you must find a way to take me over the pass to-night, too. Can you do it? I know that you can; and you must. The wires are down, and so I must go. Tell nobody but Yvonne, and warn her to tell nobody. How soon can you meet me at White Lake, and be prepared?" He never thought of questioning the willingness or the ability of Jules Legarde to do what he had asked, nor did Jules hesitate in his reply.

"One, two, mebby t'ree hours, m'sieu. I weel be dere, tout-a-fait. But, remember, m'sieu, eet ees cold; ver' cold, in the pass. Mooch furs you weel need, certainment."

Randall nodded his head, removed his hands from Jules' shoulders and started for the door; but he paused midway and thrust a hand inside his leather waistcoat, drawing forth the faked package that Wadleigh had replaced there after he had stolen the original contents of it.

"I shall not return to the square, Jules," he said. "You will have to pass that way. Take this to Judge Grayson, ask him to put it in his safe, and keep it for me. But wait. Let me be sure——"

He slipped the tape off, unrolled it and laid bare the false papers it contained. Then stood quite

still, staring. At last, without a word, he wrapped up the packet again, replaced the tape and restored the whole to his pocket. Then he spoke, but the words were addressed to himself, rather than to his companion. He said:

"Robbed! My deeds stolen while I was insensible. And Joyce knew—she must have known. Perhaps it was done with her approval. God!! . . . Go, Jules. Meet me at the stone house, at White Lake. We will have a night of toil ahead of us; a night of intense cold. But we must fight Death, in order to win Life, my friend. Life, and the right to live."

CHAPTER V

A Declaration of War

"Life, and the right to live!"

The quarter-breed felt, rather than understood, the significance of the words that Dan Randall had used in bidding him begone.

He stopped near the door and looked back. Randall had turned away, and was staring through the window at nothing. Jules nodded his head twice, sagely, contracted his massive chest and shoulders in a significant shrug, then went softly to his beloved master again and touched him tentatively upon the arm.

Dan started, and turned swiftly, and seeing that it was Jules who had touched him, he smiled. That quick smile was an expression of affection and confidence that is the result of absolute knowledge. It exists between men only when they have faced death together many times, and in many forms, and have lived together among the solitudes, and amid the vast spaces, and mysterious, endless distances.

"What is it, Jules?" he asked, and reached out and rested a hand upon the quarter-breed's shoulder.

"I know," was the low-toned reply, and Dan understood that Jules referred to the present diffi-

culties; that somehow the man knew more about them, or suspected more, than was apparent. "Een one minute I go. Bimeby, you meet me at the stone house near the lac. C'est bon. But, I have thees to say, m'sieu. Dose be ver' bad men. I know. M'sieu Wadleigh, heem worst of all, because heem not true. Heem mak' the lie all the time. Heem live the lie. Just now they all down at the cabin of m'sieu Tagarrr. I theenk so, m'sieu. Anyhow I go dat way. But, you tell Jules this. Has le m'sieu Wadleigh try to steal the railroad from m'sieu? Non? I suspect. I not know. You tell to me, eef that be so."

"Yes, Jules. He has stolen it already—or thinks he has."

"Heem, an' dose othairs? Tell me that?"

"Yes."

"Bon," said Jules, with an emphatic nod of his head. "They not get it; non. Merci, m'sieu. I go now. Bimeby you come too. I be ready." And he passed from the room, closing the door after him. Yvonne, his wife, waited in the adjoining room.

Randall, left to himself, quickly recovered his poise. In the interval that followed after Jules went from the room, he thought deeply, and he tried to think logically.

The right-of-way across the Lantowa mountain range, over and along Magician pass, belonged to him by right of purchase, had been paid for with his own money, and it must not be wrested from him by fraud, by forgery, or by force. He would fight every inch of the way, he would face whatever opposition might be brought against him, no

matter what the odds, he would confront cunning with cunning, and, if necessary, force with force.

A map that he had made with his own hands hung against the wall above Wadleigh's desk, and he crossed the room, tore it from its fastenings, and laid it open upon the table.

He rested a finger upon the spot which indicated Janver; he touched his thumb to the point where Magician was located, across the mountain, in the valley beyond it; an insignificant distance as compared with the line of the present railroad which he followed with his eyes upon the map.

The existing railroad wound and twisted its sinuous way for many miles up the valley, until it could find a tortuous course through Rickett's canyon, now impassably blocked with snow, and thence, like a running snake, it glided in many loops and curves down the other side of the mountains to Magician.

The route was like an inverted letter U, with Janver at one end of it, and Magician at the other. The space between Randall's thumb and finger, where they rested upon the map, was merely the distance straight across between those two points —but it was across the Lantowa mountains by Magician pass, and it would be both difficult and costly, as well as dangerous, to build a railroad there.

Then, without removing his hand from the map, he dropped the end of his little finger upon a dot which represented the thriving town of Allerton, twice as far toward the west, as Magician was toward the east, from Janver. Allerton was on the line of the Pacific & Hudson Bay railroad,

which from there made a long detour toward the south and east, around the southern spur of the Badger mountains, and thence northeasterly, to Lonecamp, which was forty miles south of Magician. From Carrolton, which was the present western terminal of the Manitoba & Juneau railroad, to Allerton, on the line of the P. & H. B., a distance of sixty miles, Randall had intended to extend his own road. The two places were now connected by stagecoach. The contemplated extension from Carrolton to Allerton would give the M. & J. a splendid connection from the west. But the loop thus made around the northern end of the Badger range, by way of Carrolton, to Allerton, would be almost as tortuous, and much longer, than the loop through Rickett's canyon, between Janver and Magician. And as he looked upon the map before him, he instantly saw a way by which both the difficulties could be overcome. He discovered a method by which he could render the present line of the Manitoba & Juneau railroad, which Wadleigh, Taggart, and the others, had stolen from him, practically worthless. If a railroad could be built over Magician pass, then why not construct another one through the Badger range, by way of the Black gorge? He smiled, folded the map, and put it in his pocket.

Randall raised his head, still smiling, and a photograph of Wadleigh stared at him from the opposite side of the room. He scowled, and then banged his fist down upon the table, replying aloud to the insolent stare in the pictured face.

"I'll beat you to it, Ace, as surely as I've got muscles to work with, and brains to direct them,"

he said. "I'll beat you to it, and I'll fight every inch of the way with every weapon that you use, dollars, fists or guns. I'll fight every one of your bunch of thieves to a knockout finish, and until you haven't a frazzled fringe left for a foothold."

He raised his clenched fist and shook it, and added:

"And I will win, too."

CHAPTER VI

With Dog-Like Devotion

Jules Legarde, product of the silent places and the mysterious distances, was simple-minded, faithful, honest and true. He did not lie, he had never stolen, and he was utterly ignorant of the arts of deception as they are practiced in civilized communities. All his life, since Yvonne was a child and had been left as a charge upon him by her father, who had been alike his mentor and teacher in the great white spaces, Jules had toiled for her. She had been his religion and the goal of his ambitions. When she grew to womanhood, and was ready for the wifehood for which Jules had waited so patiently, she had no thought of denying him. But she did make it a condition of their marriage that he should forsake the life of a trapper, and Jules had harbored no mental reservation in the promise he then made to her.

But, although he could abandon the north, the solitudes, the snows, and the dangers that beckoned to him, he did not and could not give up his longings for them; and Yvonne knew that he did not. She gave her silent approval to his unspoken plan of retaining his well-trained huskies, and she knew (and said not a word about it) that as soon as the snows came, he loved to steal away from his home for a day, or two, or three days at a time to

pass the interval with his dogs, and amid the silences. She knew of the secret place over near White Lake where he kept the dogs hidden away from prying eyes and curious tongues. They were the one remaining link between him and the life he had loved—but which he would have abandoned over and over again for love of her.

The year that Jules had passed among the distances as guide and companion to Dan Randall had been the last of his absences. After that, he and Yvonne were married, and it had been Dan's generosity that had made their marriage possible so soon. Thus there was an added tie to bind the affections of both to Dan. If Jules saw Deity and worshipped God through the eyes and soul of Yvonne, Dan Randall came next in his regard.

To Yvonne, Dan was "The M'sieu." When she made use of the the title she uttered it reverently. Her belief in him was unbounded; her devotion was absolute—and she loved Jules none the less in that she so worshipped Dan. Jules was an institution. He belonged to her; was father and brother to her, as well as her husband.

But in her reverential soul, and in every throb of her loyal heart, she adored Dan Randall, and she did not in the least know that she did so. For no human woman could have been purer, and gentler, and truer, in every thought and act and hope, than Yvonne Legarde. It was never passion that she felt for Randall. It was adoration. And she, unsoiled spirit that she was, would not have known the meaning of either word, and would not have cared to differentiate between them had she been told.

So, when Jules, in passing from the house to do Randall's bidding, said to her in his simple, straightforward way, "M'sieu, he have need of me. We cross Lantowa by the pass, to-night. Eet ees for m'sieu, a last resort. M'sieu Wadleigh have heem offend. How? Je ne sais pas. We go by the Magician pass. You, Yvonne, are not to tell," she merely nodded her pretty head in acquiescence. Then, while he was hastily collecting articles here and there to take with him, she bethought herself, not of the dangers to be encountered, but of the difficulties, and asked:

"But, Jules, can you cross by the pass, to-night, do you think?"

"Eet ees fait accompli," he answered, and passed out at the door.

Yvonne nodded her pretty head, and seated herself on the edge of a chair, to think. It was indeed as good as done to cross Lantowa mountains by Magician pass in the dead of winter and so soon after the storm, since M'sieu willed it, and Jules said it.

She started hastily to her feet when, a few minutes later, a door opened and Randall appeared at the threshold.

"M'sieu," she said, quickly, and courtesied with natural grace. The warm blood leaped in her veins and dyed throat and cheeks and brow, although she was unconscious of it.

"Jules has gone?" Dan asked her, glancing about the neatly kept room.

"Yes, m'sieu."

"Did he tell you where we are going, Yvonne?"

"Across the mountain by the pass. Yes, m'sieu.

Eet will be ver' bad ovair the pass thees night. Will ms'ieu be seated?"

"No; thank you. I must be on my way. If by any chance Mr. Wadleigh should return here, you are not to tell him that I have gone away, Yvonne."

"No, m'sieu."

"I have been losing my friends to-day, little one," he said, stepping forward and taking both her hands in his and looking down upon her with his whimsical, kindly smile. She was twenty years younger than Jules, and nearly five years his own junior, and he felt toward her as if she were a child. "But I still have you—you and Jules."

"Yes, m'sieu. Toujours—forever," she replied with an emphasis that flashed in her darkly brilliant eyes.

"Thank you," he said, knowing that the reply was sincere. "Are you quite willing that I shall take Jules across the mountain with me to-night? . . . that I shall take him away from you?"

"Jules is yours—as I am, m'sieu," she replied, simply. She would have thought nothing of starting upon that wild journey with him, herself, had he called upon her to do so.

"I shall not live in Janver again, Yvonne; not for the present," he said, releasing her hands and retreating to the shelf, where he rested one arm upon it. And then he added, hastily: "Don't look so frightened. I am not going away. Only, I shall not live in the town. I have been thinking, while I waited in that other room for the time to pass, where I would live. There are reasons why

I shall not care to remain in Janver, and yet I must be near. . . . Do you know of the little stone house beyond White Lake that is built into the side of the mountain near the entrance to the pass? It is there Jules keeps his dogs, and where he hides himself away, sometimes."

"Yes, m'sieu. I have been there when Jules did not know it, to mak' it clean for heem when he should go again." She spoke with a fascinating touch of accent, and her English was usually very good. But there were times when she lapsed into the polyglot of her husband, who mixed French, English and Indian together with delightful unconcern.

"I shall go there to live, when I return. I shall move all of my things over there as soon as it is possible." He sighed. "I wish they were there now, and that you were my little housekeeper, with good old Jules to look after and watch over us both." He smiled down upon her.

"Yes," she said, and did not smile. "Eet would be — nice, m'sieu," she added, and looked up quickly at him with an unasked question in her eyes. "Eet ees—as good as done," she concluded, smiling at him. The unasked question had been answered in her own thought, and already she had determined what she would do while the m'sieu was absent.

"I shall need you both," Randall went on, "to take care of me, and to help me in all that I will have to do. I would be alone, indeed, without you and Jules to stand by me, just now. And the stone house will be just the place for me, because it is so near to the pass. As soon as the snow

melts, and disappears, I shall be very busy. Would you like to live there with Jules and me, little one?"

"Yes, m'sieu."

"Perhaps it is not right for me to take you away from Mr. Wadleigh, but he has little need of you now, and I will have much. I doubt if he would wish to keep you on, anyway, knowing, as he does, that both of you are my good friends, and will remain so. You will not feel sorry to leave him, and to come to me?"

"No, m'sieu. He ees not good, like you. He ees bad. He has bad thoughts, like the wolves, when the snow is deep and the game is scarce. See; when Jules is not here, and I am alone in the house with m'sieu Wadleigh, I keep this"—she pulled one of the smallest of the hunting knives that Jules used, from its sheath, and showed it to him, and as she returned it to its hiding place, she added: "Twice, m'sieu, I have had to hold it in my hand when he has talked to me."

Dan merely nodded. He understood, but he chose not to manifest more than his approval of her attitude.

"There is something that I want you to do for me, and at once, Yvonne," he said, and held out a key toward her. "You know the small leather trunk that is mine? It is in the corner of my room, near the bed, at Judge Grayson's house, on the Square. Get it, and hide it away somewhere —no matter where. Mr. Wadleigh might seek to get possession of it. The judge might let him take it away. Bring it here, if you like, temporarily.

Only do not leave it there. My very life, or more, might some day depend upon the contents of that trunk. You will get it, and hide it for me? I shall not have time."

"Yes, m'sieu," she replied, with quiet emphasis.

"Behind the trunk is a large roll of papers—they are maps, and tracings, and blue-prints; I shall want them, also. On the shelf in the closet, there is a locked tin box. Care for that, too. The other things, the books, and all that, you can leave where they are until I return—or until Jules shall return without me in case I am detained. I will have no friends here, after to-day, but you and Jules. I tell you of it because I want you to understand how thoroughly I must rely upon you both. Remember, you are to tell nobody where I have gone."

"Not mademoiselle Joie, m'sieu? (Yvonne could never quite master the name of Joyce, but hitherto the French word for joy had seemed to fit in with her ideas of Miss Maitland, and she invariably called her so.)

"Miss Maitland least of all," was the quick response, and Dan swung upon his heels and left the house without a backward glance. The introduction of Joyce's name, and the thought that she would not care whither he had gone, quenched for the moment all thought of his other affairs; the maps, and blue-prints, and papers, and the contents of the leather trunk.

CHAPTER VII

Randall's Renunciation

White Lake, across which was the appointed rendezvous with Jules, was nearly eight miles away by the traveled road, which followed the course of the railway for part of the distance; but it was somewhat less than half that distance if one chose the short cut over the ridge and across the river at the opposite side of it, which was now frozen solid. The stone house to which Dan had referred in his talk with Yvonne, was beyond the lake, and above it—a mile, more or less, south of the entrance to Magician pass.

Dan seized upon an extra pair of snowshoes that belonged to Jules, and carried them in his hands until he was well outside of the town. He stopped to adjust them when he was close to the top of the ridge, for he well knew that there were treacherous spots in the flinty crust on the snow.

The wind was blowing half a gale and the air was bitterly cold, but Dan was accustomed to that and minded it not at all, although he did pass around to the lee side of a boulder while he fastened the snowshoes to his feet. When he raised his head after he had finished with the rawhide thongs, he was facing Janver. Directly in the line of his vision was the house in which Joyce Mait-

land lived, the largest and the most pretentious one in the town.

Randall stiffened in his tracks at the sight of it, and with the thought of all that the four walls of it inclosed.

His dead and buried hopes were there in the person of Joyce Maitland. She had been the incentive of all of his ambitious hopes and aims that had come to life again, through her, after his return from that year among the solitudes of the frozen north with only Jules Legarde for a companion and friend.

It all came back to him while he stood there gazing across the bleak and desolate waste of crust-bound snow that intervened between it and him. He had not meant to return to civilization when, with Jules, he had made his way out from the Great Slave and Great Bear lake country to obtain new supplies, and in order that Jules might ascertain that all was well with his ward and charge, Yvonne.

"Some day, mabby," Jules had told him then, "la petite Yvonne she say she will marry me; dat is what her papa say he want, when he die in my arms eight years ago. She was leetle mademoiselle, den—ssso high. Now, she is w'at you call un young lady; she have growed up. She have been to school with the factor at de post, an' now she at Janver, where she have learned all they can teach, an' I know dat she wait for me to be my good wife, like her papa want her to be. He was my friend, just de same age as me, m'sieu, so la petite Yvonne she is like she was my own leetle girl. But, it is bettair dat she marry me—Jules—

who is old enough to be her papa, than she tak' up weeth somme bad young man like dose fellers in de settlements. . . . So, m'sieu, we go out, now. We will go far to the south—to Janver, in Saskatchewan, where Yvonne waits for me. I will give her the money you pay to me, and den I come back into de north with you, m'sieu, for un more year—an' then, mabby, I have earned enough."

That was why Dan Randall had ventured as far south as Janver, but with no intention whatever of remaining longer than was necessary to see Jules married to his Yvonne, for he had already decided in his own mind that the two should not be compelled to wait another year or more because of the need of sufficient money to wed.

Then, Chance, or Fate, Destiny or Circumstance —whatever one may please to call it—had intervened in Dan Randall's plans. Winter, very much earlier than usual, had set in fiercely while they were still two hundred miles northwest of Janver on the Wabiscaw river; and two days later, in a raging tempest of wind and snow they had come upon Joyce Maitland, hopelessly lost and on the verge of perishing, seated disconsolately and in despair beside the body of her half-breed guide, who had accidentally shot himself to death. And Dan had loved Joyce from the moment when he picked her up in his arms, carried her to safety, wrapped her in warm blankets, and poured hot tea into her to bring her back to life.

In Janver he had found Boniface Wadleigh, a former chum, a lifelong friend in whom he had no hesitation in confiding—for the two had not met for years, and Wadleigh had not, until then, heard

about the tragedy in Randall's life that had driven him into the wastelands of the Far North.

Wadleigh, an adventurer by character and from choice, held a nominal position as the acting manager of the nearly defunct M. & J. railroad; he had succeeded in impressing Randall with its possibilities—and it had ended by Randall's financing Wadleigh's scheme; by his purchase of the railroad company's stock; by his inducing Joyce Maitland to consent to hold all but the directors' shares of the stock, in her name; and finally by the climax of affairs that had been brought to a showdown that very day, through the treachery and dishonesty and underhand machinations of Boniface Wadleigh.

It had been only because of Joyce Maitland, and his great love of her, that Randall had decided to stay, and to invest, and to put forth every atom of his great energy in the development of the railroad. It had been his excuse, made silently to himself, for clinging to that fringe of civilization instead of returning at once to the Great Slave region, whither every other impulse than that one, beckoned him; and then, as time had passed, and nothing had happened to startle him from his sense of security, the tragedy in his past from which he had fled to the North, had faded to but little more than a memory which confronted him only from time to time—only when he was alone, and got to thinking about Joyce, and his love for her, and realized that, as an honorable man, he could never ask her to be his wife while he continued to live under a name that was, in reality, only half of his own full name.

But he had believed that Joyce knew that he loved her and realized that there was a reason which would be presently explained why he had not declared himself; and he had also believed, as implicity as he believed in God, that Joyce loved him—until the events of that day which was now almost at an end.

The awakening had been terrible; it was still horribly unbelievable and benumbing when he stood in the lee of the boulder at the crest of the ridge and gazed across the waste of windswept snowdrifts at the house that was her home.

"It is renunciation, Joyce," he murmured inaudibly, moving his lips to form the words, but making no sound. "It is my awakening—but I had rather, much rather, have dreamed on, indefinitely. . . . I might almost think it was retribution, if I did not know my own justification for what I did. I would not have run away, I would not have forgotten my own surname and have sought to hide myself forever from the past if I had committed a wanton crime; but——" he caught his breath, shook his head, clenched his fists, and half turned his back to the valley with its cluster of houses; nor did he turn his gaze again in that direction.

If he had done so he would have seen Joyce rush from her home into the road and wave frantically toward him with the white worsted house-shawl that she tore from her shoulders. She was bareheaded and unfurred against the intense cold, but she stood there waving, and calling to him at the top of her voice until a woman ran from the house after her and pulled her reluctantly into it

again just at the moment when Dan Randall squared his shoulders, and, without turning about for another glance toward Janver, disappeared over the crest of the ridge.

Joyce had called to him, beckoned to him, besought him; but he did not know it; and he strode away seeing only the picture of her that was uppermost in his mind—that picture that she had made when she stood in front of him in the office of the railroad company, with the heavy quirt, butt foremost, in her grasp—the quirt with which he believed she had struck him down in defence of Ace Wadleigh.

His thoughts were bitter, indeed—and, as against Wadleigh, revengeful.

"I'll build the Cut-Off," he said aloud to the wastes and winds as he plodded on toward the stone house near White Lake, for the habit of thinking aloud grows upon men who pass much time among the frozen solitudes. "I will build two of them. One, across Magician pass, and another one through the Black Gorge of the Badgers, from Janver to Allerton. I will build them, and operate them, if it takes every dollar I own, and every ounce of energy and strength that I possess. I will build them—and I will put the present M. & J. railroad so out of business that its stock certificates won't be worth that much wrapping paper. Wadleigh, and Taggart, and Cuthbert, and the rest of them can have the M. & J. . . . We'll see. We will see what comes out in the wash. I have been asleep, and dreaming, but I'm awake now. . . . Oh, yes," he added, a few moments later, "I am quite awake, now—quite."

CHAPTER VIII

Joyce

Joyce had not remained very long face down on her bed in a passion of tears after the scene with Dan at the M. & J. office. She started to her feet when there came a rap at her door and the package that Ace Wadleigh had sent by the hand of Taggart was delivered to her.

She tore it open, believing for the moment that it was something from Dan, but she found, instead that it contained a mass of newspaper clippings—and a typewritten document from Wadleigh, which purported to be an explanation of them.

She did not need to read them to know what they were about. She knew already. She had known, almost from the beginning, although neither Dan Randall nor Ace Wadleigh had suspected her knowledge.

But the packet, arriving as it did, and in the manner it did, enlightened her upon many of the puzzling occurrences of the day. She read enough of Ace Wadleigh's typewritten statement to recognize the animus of it, although it was clothed in the softest speech and phrase which that master of sophistry could command. She was at the window trying to think out the incomprehensible aspect of it all when she saw Dan ascending the

slope toward the summit of the ridge, and intuition, rather than judgment, told her instantly whither he was bound. So she ran outside and waved to him, and called aloud to him—in vain.

When the woman pulled her into the house and began to rub her ears and nose and cheeks with coarse, rough, but kindly hands, Joyce knew that she required no such attention. The blood that was coursing so madly through her veins, the excitement and the eagerness that was stirring within her, would more than overcome the brief exposure to the frost. She broke away and ran to her own room again, and it did not take her long to wrap herself once more in the furs which enveloped her from head to foot, and to go forth with all speed toward the house where Ace Wadleigh lived. There were a hundred questions, and more, which she had determined to ask him without delay. But when she got there the house was deserted. Yvonne had lost no time in going about the directions that Dan Randall had given her.

The door was not fastened. Nobody thought of locking doors, in Janver. Joyce raised the latch and entered; and she knew, the instant she crossed the threshold, that Dan had been there. She saw upon the floor where he had been standing while he talked with Yvonne some tiny shreds of the Turkish tobacco which he alone in all that community used in his pipe, and in the occasional rolling of cigarettes; and she found on the hearth, where he had flung it, unlighted, when he had gone out so suddenly, the cigarette itself.

Joyce crossed to the door that opened upon Wadleigh's part of the house, and tapped against

it. Receiving no answer, she pushed it open, and entered, and the condition of the room, evidencing as it did every sign of a hasty departure, told her acute senses and quick intuition much that had happened—and suggested much more that might still happen.

"What is the meaning of it all?" she asked herself, inaudibly. Then she wheeled sharply at the click of the latch of the outer door.

She thought that the newcomer might be Wadleigh, and for an instant was paralyzed by the thought of his finding her there. But she heard something fall to the floor of the other room with a heavy thud, and she stepped quickly into the doorway to discover Yvonne, who was looking down upon a small leather trunk, which she had evidently just brought into the house; and, though really small, it looked much too large for the little French woman to have carried on her back. Joyce had never seen the trunk before, so she did not recognize it as the property of Dan Randall.

Yvonne, with the instinct of wildness that was inherent in her, sensed the presence of another person, and turned. An hour sooner she would have greeted Joyce with a warm smile of welcome, but now, with that last remark of the m'sieu still in her mind, her eyes remained cold and uncompromising, and there was the suggestion of a frown between her brows. M'sieu had said: "Miss Maitland least of all"; and Yvonne remembered not only the words, but the tone of them.

Joyce did not ask the question that had been in her mind. The presence of the leather trunk and the attitude of Yvonne as she bent over it,

brought forth a different one. For she had seen Dan Randall crossing the ridge, and she already knew about the devotion which this pretty little French woman and her husband, Jules, gave to him. She spoke, therefore, impulsively.

"Are you going away, Yvonne? and with Mr. Randall?" she asked, rather breathlessly.

Yvonne nodded. Her brilliant eyes, now somewhat sombre in their expression, stared unwinkingly and uncompromisingly into the eyes of Joyce Maitland.

"Where are you going?"

Yvonne did not respond to that question by so much as a gesture, and Joyce, looking upon her, vaguely wondered how it was that a face so pretty and usually so animated, could take upon itself such stolidity of expression. She went on:

"He has already gone. I saw him. He was crossing the ridge toward White Lake, and the pass. He was fastening snowshoes to his feet. Surely, Yvonne, he is not thinking to cross Lantowa now?"

No answer. No change of expression. Nothing at all from Yvonne.

"Won't you answer me? Please tell me where Mr. Randall was going. . . . What is the matter with you, Yvonne? You have always liked me —or seemed to. You have been kind to me. . . . Please tell me what it all means, won't you?"

"How, mademoiselle, should Yvonne know where m'sieu may go? M'sieu does not consult Yvonne about hees business." She had found her voice at last.

"But he has been here," Joyce cried out. "I

know that he has. See!" She picked up the discarded cigarette from the hearth and held it out toward the Frenchwoman; but Yvonne only shrugged her shoulders in a gesture which meant nothing at all. "Why do you bring that leather trunk into your house? Whose is it? Please tell me what I wish to know, for I am sure that you can, if you will."

Yvonne was silent. More, she did not offer her guest a chair. Never before within the knowledge of Joyce had the pretty little Frenchwoman been guilty of a breach of etiquette.

"Where is Mr. Wadleigh?" Joyce asked, after another moment. "Has he gone away, too, over that terrible mountain?"

Yvonne started. Mademoiselle had really guessed, then, the destination of m'sieu; or perhaps he had told her, or sent word to her. But the question was a safe one. Yvonne could reply to that, and she did so, volubly.

"Heem? Bah!!" she exclaimed, and the scorn in her voice and contempt in her eyes when she referred to Wadleigh spoke volumes. She felt, too, that she had no need to restrain herself upon that subject. Was she not leaving, and at once, as soon as she could get her things together, the house of m'sieu Wadleigh? for the young woman had no thought of awaiting the return of her husband and the m'sieu to make the change for which permission had been granted her—for which she had prayed in the silence because she had not dared to ask it. She had determined while Randall was talking to her that the stone house at White Lake should shelter her that very night,

and she had lost not a moment of time in securing the leather trunk, and in procuring the services of one of her own countrymen in the town to assist her in making the change. Presently, as soon as mademoiselle should have gone, she would return to the room of m'sieu for the tin box, and the papers, and the roll of blue-prints and tracings that stood in the corner. *"Heem!!"* she said, with her characteristic shrug. "I do not know where heem go. I not care. Heem come to the back door, like a t'ief in the night. Heem entre, heem put on hees furs, and heem go out again, also like one t'ief. Then, bimeby, as mademoiselle say, the m'sieu come here. M'sieu go too. But not like the other one. Not like one t'ief. And now I go, ver' soon. . . . Apres vous." It was a hint, none too delicately given, for Joyce to take her departure, and Joyce read it correctly, and realized, also, that it would be utterly useless to seek for further information from Yvonne, whose attitude gravely disturbed her.

Only yesterday Yvonne had kissed her hands, and had laughed outright with gladness when in return she had kissed the Frenchwoman on the cheek. Only yesterday, at the slightest sign of pain or sorrow, Yvonne would impulsively have thrown her arms around the girl whom she knew the m'sieu loved so well; but now it was all changed.

Joyce could not understand it in the least. So many things had happened since the moment of her entering the office of the railroad company that afternoon, and she could not find a logical or a reasonable explanation for any of them.

But the American girl had pluck, and she was possessed with the courage of her convictions. She was brave to fearlessness where real danger was concerned, was inured to the cold and the hardships of the North, and she did not hesitate when the conviction of impending calamity came upon her in that moment, to decide for her what she should do.

There had been a quarrel of some sort between Ace Wadleigh and Dan Randall, and she was, somehow, involved in it. That much she believed she knew. Wadleigh had stolen into his own home "like a t'ief in the night," had taken his furs, and gone, and therefore it seemed to her that he had started, and with secrecy, to cross Lantowa mountain by Magician pass.

And Dan had followed Wadleigh to his house, had arrived there after the departure of Wadleigh and had gone away again, with snowshoes; therefore, for some reason, he was following on the trail of the man with whom he had quarreled.

To her quick mind there could be but one explanation for that act, and the mere thought of it frightened her horribly. She knew about that violent temper that was Dan Randall's inheritance —she knew, too, to what lengths it would drive him when it was thoroughly aroused, for she was much better informed than either Randall or Wadleigh guessed of the terrible consequences of one such experience of Dan's.

So she summed it all up in the decision that the quarrel between the two men had urged the immediate and secret departure of Wadleigh for Magician, at the other side of the mountain; that

Dan, having sought him at his home and found him gone, had followed, and with the certain anger in his heart that might lead to the death of one, or both, if the two should get together in the mountain pass. Added to Dan's other cause for anger no matter what it might be, would be the terrible rage of jealousy, and there is none other so fierce and implacable. For Dan had said enough to Joyce in his last speech with her at the office to assure her of that much.

Her one thought, as she turned her back upon Yvonne and ran from the house, was that she must somehow get to the entrance to the pass before Dan Randall could make it, although she realized, even when the thought came to her, how impossible it appeared to be. But she was determined to make the effort, and there was just one way by which it might be done.

The railroad was impassibly blocked, and fathoms deep with snow in the canyon through the mountains, but it had been kept open as far as Nelson, at the entrance to Rickett's canyon, and there were locomotives in the round-house near the station. One of them, at least, would have steam, and it could take her as far as Bluerock, which was the nearest approach the railway made to Magician pass. There would still be two miles and more to cover to the pass, but there were snowshoes to be had, a-plenty, and she was fleetness itself in the use of them.

The engineer whom she would find in charge at the roundhouse was devoted to her. She always rode in the cab with him through Rickett's canyon, in the summer time, and he had been de-

lighted to show her the manner of starting, and stopping, and curbing, and controlling the monster of iron and steel that was so entirely responsive to his slightest touch. Engineer Tom Rodman, taciturn, and grizzled by the frosts of years though he was, had long ago succumbed to the charm of Joyce Maitland, as all did who came in contact with it; and Joyce knew and understood her power without being in the least spoiled by it.

Rodman was not beside his engine, nor anywhere near it, when she got there. She called many times to him, but he did not reply. But the big, metallic steed was there. It stood in its place, resting, while it pulsed and throbbed like a live thing that breathed with the regularity of heart beats.

Joyce ran hither and thither calling to Rodman, but he was temporarily across the tracks in a place where there was a glowing fire and warmth and cheer, looking over the shoulders of a man who was playing cards with three others; and his fireman was beside him. Neither of them heard the voice of Joyce Maitland calling to them.

In her excitement and eagerness Joyce sprang upon the step of the cab and lifted herself into it. A glance at the steam guage reassured her. She closed the door of the fire-box. A look ahead along the rails told her that the switches were correctly set, and she remembered all that Rodman had taught her. She knew also that the track would be clear, and that she had nothing to fear on that account. Without an instant of hesitation she opened the throttle with a gentle touch and let the steam into the cylinders, and the great ma-

chine moved forward as softly as the tread of a wild animal upon the snow, and without a jar.

Joyce peered ahead of her along the gleaming rails, keen-eyed and alert, while the engine crawled from its stall in the round-house, and out across the locked turn-table which had been set for its ready accommodation. It was the only locomotive with steam up on that division, as Joyce well knew.

Every switch was as correctly set as if each one had been specially thrown for her sudden extremity. She saw them, and was glad; and she opened the throttle little by little, but rapidly, nevertheless, so that by the time the locomotive arrived at the main line track and swung out upon it, Rodman's engine was going well, and gaining speed with every plunge of the pistons.

There was only a lone young woman at the throttle in the cab, but she was a determined one, and she believed that she had a duty to perform which was far greater than any she had ever faced before. She went about it as the locomotive went about its part of the performance—with ever-increasing energy and life; and presently—Joyce had no idea of the rate of speed they had attained—she was fairly flying down the main line track toward the goal of her present ambition: the small, deserted station called Bluerock, used only in the summer time, situated two miles from the entrance to Magician pass.

She had forgotten all about snowshoes and was reminded of the fact only when she discovered a pair of them that belonged to Rodman tied fast

beneath the roof of the cab. She would take them down, presently, and use them.

Once she climbed down from her perch to open the furnace door and feed several shovelfuls of coal to the fire, and when she mounted to the driver's seat again she was amazed by the speed they had attained; for there was a slight downward grade from Janver, until the rails ran along beside the bank of the river.

It was eight miles to Bluerock. She was amazed when she came upon the place so quickly. It seemed to loom before her as soon as she climbed back upon Rodman's perch after feeding the fire. But she understood the air, and how to use it, that being one of the things that Rodman had taught her, and she came to a stop at the end of what would have been the platform of the station had it not been many feet deep under the snow. Deliberately she backed her iron horse to a better place for dismounting, opened the door of the fire-box to deaden the fire, and, with the snowshoes in her hand, jumped down.

And then, when she had adjusted the snowshoes properly to her small feet, she noticed for the first time that the daylight was fading and that darkness would soon be upon her.

Winter days are short in the far northwest, but Joyce was undaunted, and without a backward glance she started across the snow toward the mouth of Magician pass.

CHAPTER IX

At the Devil's Pulpit

Much happened on Lantowa mountain during the wild winter's night that followed.

Ace Wadleigh and Ben Taggart, with the Indian, Lightfoot, for guide, had a good hour's start of Dan Randall and Jules, and that much advantage at the beginning of the trip across Magician pass meant a lot. It meant for one thing that the men who were conspiring to deprive Randall of all that he had struggled so hard to obtain and who intended now to rob him of all he possessed, had passed over the easiest part of the trail and approached the beginning of the climax of their hazardous journey, while Dan and Jules were at the commencement of it.

Also, with the going down of the sun behind the Badger range across the valley to the west of Janver came not only black darkness, but also the sudden and unheralded beginning of another violent storm. Even Jules had not foreseen that storm which swept down upon them from the north with almost the suddenness of a lightning stroke, and he shook his head doubtfully when it burst upon them in all its fury at the moment when they entered the first defile of the pass.

"Heem ver' bad; dat storm, m'sieu," he said

to Dan, as they were starting on again, after having been compelled literally to stop in their tracks by the force and fury of the first onslaught of the wind. "Here, eet ees nothing; but up dere—sacrrre!"

"Wadleigh is a good bit ahead of us, Jules," Dan replied, gesturing toward the plainly marked trail that the others had left behind them, and which was becoming rapidly obliterated before their eyes by the darkness, as well as by the storm. In another five or ten minutes it would entirely disappear, as if men and dogs had never passed that way since the beginning of the world. They had come upon it a hundred yards back, for Wadleigh and his companions had approached the gateway through the mountains, from the railway tracks near Bluestone, while Dan and Jules arrived from the opposite direction, toward White Lake.

Jules nodded his head. He had studied that trail when they first came upon it, but he had made no remark concerning it. He had not been told how much or how little his beloved m'sieu knew concerning that other expedition over the pass. Jules was not one to volunteer unnecessary information, but he could read the signs of a trail with the same clearness and exactitude that would have applied to Dan with the printed page of a book before his eyes.

"Who has Wadleigh got with him?" Dan asked, presently. Jules replied without hesitation, for he knew how to answer as perfectly as if he had seen them with his own eyes.

"M'sieu Taggarrr, Lightfoot with heem sled, and seex dogs—and ze bum," he said, and shouted

at his own faithful creatures to urge them onward. A terrific gust of wind charged with millions of particles of frozen snow broke upon them from the upper end of the defile and shut off further opportunity for speech for many minutes; but it lulled, presently, as it had begun, and while the dogs shook their shaggy coats and lapped up tonguesful of freshly fallen snow, Dan repeated the last two words that Jules had used.

"The bum? Who is he? Whom do you mean, Jules?"

"Heem called Pete Gaffney, m'sieu. Heem one beeg drunk. What for they breeng heem wit' dem? I do not know what for. But et ees not good. No, m'sieu. Heem wear boots—wit' heels. Heem freeze, mabby. Heem drunk, too, mabby, an' not understand." He ended with an expressive shrug of his wide shoulders.

Ten minutes later they stopped again, and Jules, having shouldered and fought his way through what appeared to be an impenetrable wall of snow, led the dogs into a cavernous recess among the rocks where they were temporarily sheltered from the fury of the storm that raged harmlessly over their heads.

"We rest ici," he announced, calmly. "No good go on, now. Too dark. Get lost, mabby. Bimeby the moon, heem shine behind the clouds; give light just one leetle bit."

"Can we make it, Jules?" Dan asked, anxiously.

"For sure, m'sieu. We will do eet, coute qu'il-coute. Yes, m'sieu. But now, for a time, we rest. Afterward, we make much haste. Ah, ze weend, heem blow for sure."

The cold was intense even within that sheltered nook among the rocks, and it was not long before the practical Jules roused Dan from a sleepy lethargy into which he was falling, shook him roughly, and announced:

"Allons, m'sieu! We go on. Go to sleep now, nevair wake up. The moon, heem wayway behind theem clouds, but heem light, just a leetle bit; heem bore t'rough dem so we see 'nuff, mabby."

The dogs whined protestingly, but the start was made, and for an hour after that they toiled onward and upward amid the smother of the falling snow, which would have filled the defile and effectually have impeded their further ascent had it not been that the direction of the wind, as well as the fury of it, cleared the gulch of the white tempest almost as fast as it fell into it. The moon, thickly veiled behind the storm clouds, still found some means of lessening the profundity of the darkness, rather than of dispelling it. They could see dimly the outlines of the cliffs above them against the sky whenever for an instant the flying snow was blown away, or was lifted.

For the most of the time they stumbled doggedly onward, keeping to the course by the instinct of the dogs, and by reason of the long experience of Jules Legarde, developed under even worse conditions than that one. Nor would it have been possible for them to get very far out of their route, owing to the narrowness of the defile through which they were passing. Still, there were many treacherous places to guard against and avoid. The mountain torrents, which springtime after springtime for untold ages had been

deepening and widening Magician pass, had left many a crevasse and jagged depth in its course, in which lurked certain death if one should wander over the edge of one of them.

It was far into the night when they arrived at Devil's Pulpit; aptly named, because it stood at the head of the defile up which they had been toiling, facing it. In the summer time one might climb hazardously to the top of it and from there look down through the twisted maze of rocks beneath the jutting cliffs on either side, to the spread of green beyond it; and many a party had been sheltered from a sudden shower beneath it, for the ice and water of many centuries had worn out a roomy hollow under the massive rock, and had left it supported by three roughly-shaped natural pillars. Sometimes, when there was a particularly violent rain storm, the stage coach, which in summer crossed by the pass between Janver and Magician twice each week, had been driven beneath the Devil's Pulpit; and the six mules that drew it, with the huge coach and passengers, found ample room there for their accommodation. Beyond it, the pass was wide and open to the summit, where the mountains towered upward and farther and farther away on either side.

It was the last stretch of climb beyond the Pulpit, and even more difficult than the way through the gorge, and also the first half of the descent beyond the summit of the pass, which Dan and Jules dreaded most that night, although neither had mentioned a word to the other concerning it.

Jules had determined to stop at Devil's Pulpit. Wood in plenty was always cut and stored in the

hollow during the summer, for there were many cold days and nights at the beginning of winter, before the snow came, when travelers across the pass were glad to stop there to make coffee and to warm themselves, before continuing the journey.

Oddly enough, Randall and Jules found the place closed against them when they got there. The wind had picked up giant handfuls of the driving snow, and had packed it against the massive pillars, and around them, reaching out from one to another until it had closed all three openings. But Jules knew how to find the weakest place in the snowy barrier, and with the short-handled shovel that was part of the equipment of the dog-sled, he soon tore an opening through it.

The dogs waited with impatience while he did so, and they lurched forward through the breach the moment it was big enough. But they stopped, with the sled filling the narrow passageway as if it were wedged there. They whined, and huddled close together, and acted so strangely that Dan, who knew something of the way of huskies, wondered what had happened.

Jules knew, instantly, what had affected the dogs. Every one of the eight was a personal pet, and had been raised by him from puppyhood. They were not like the animals we read about, which are taught to serve and to haul heavy burdens across the mountains, and are hammered and kicked and cursed at, and sometimes eaten, when other means of procuring food are not at hand. Jules knew at once that there was a human being there, and one who was a stranger to them; and he called to them in French, and by their names,

one after another, while he worked with all his might with the shovel, and so tore his way into the hollow beside them.

"What is it, Jules?" Dan called out to him.

"A man, m'sieu. The bum, I t'ink. Yes. Eet ees the drunk. Can you come een?"

"Yes. . . . Where is he? Heavens! I thought it was dark outside, but in here——"

The striking of a light by Jules, who had hurried across the hollow, interrupted further speech.

With quickness that was remarkable under the circumstances, Jules kindled a fire with the dry wood that he knew perfectly well where to find. Then he ran back to the man who was lying in a huddled heap upon the rock floor of the cavernous place, and unceremoniously brushing Randall aside listened at his breast for heart beats until he was convinced that there was still the flutter of life inside the man. Then he set to work with a will, and as one who knew exactly what to do.

Dan assisted him where and however he could, and once they had the satisfaction of seeing the man open his eyes half way, but not to intelligence, nor consciousness of his surroundings; only to a partial realization of the intense pain he was suffering because of their efforts to bring him back to life. Then he died.

"No use, m'sieu," Jules said, without emotion, rising. "Eet ees la mort. He ees gone. Voila. Eet ees for that he was made to come here." He shrugged his shoulders and turned his back upon the body, moving toward the fire, which was now blazing merrily.

Dan hesitated a moment, then followed him, but

with a backward glance toward the dead man as he went. It had been their intention on reaching the Devil's Pulpit to rest for an hour or more, to make some coffee, and to eat a little of the food they had brought with them, and then to take up their journey again.

The dead man was merely an incident from Jules' point of view. They had not been able to save him, and had only succeeded in making him sensible of one moment of excruciating pain, in their efforts to revive him. But while Jules made the coffee and Dan sat not too near to the fire, watching, he found that the last remark that Jules had made kept recurring to him: "Eet ees for that he was made to come here."

CHAPTER X

The Dead Forger

When the coffee was ready, and the warm glow of it pervaded their bodies, Dan asked:

"Why did you say that, Jules? Why do you think that they brought him up here on the pass, to desert him and let him freeze to death?"

Jules shrugged his shoulders before he replied. Then he drained his cup and reached out for the pot to refill it.

"Eet seem so to me, m'sieu," he said. "For why deed they breeng the bum ovair the pass? To keel heem; non? Eet seems so to Jules. He has been ivre—ver' drunk, m'sieu—what you call paralyzed—all the time seence m'sieu Wadleigh have heem all the day at hees office, and all the night afterward at la cabane. And all the time the bum, heem write, write, write, ovair and ovair. Je ne sais quoi for."

"Do you mean that he was at the office with Wadleigh? this man—this dead man whom you call the bum?"

"Oui, m'sieu. Two, t'ree days, apres you go away."

"And at the house, in Wadleigh's room with him? Writing?"

"Yes, m'sieu. And the sheets heem write,

m'sieu Wadleigh heem tear up into leetle bits, so, and so, and t'row away. But I, Jules, pick up the pieces, every leetle bit and save them for m'sieu. Yvonne, she have dem now for m'sieu. The writing, all of eet, was like the same which you, m'sieu, put at the bottom of the cheque." Jules could neither write nor read, but if once he had seen a signature, it was like the track of an animal in the snow; he never forgot it.

"So," said Dan, and turned his head to glance toward the dead man, "he was the forger who wrote my name so many times on the sheet of paper I found on Wadleigh's desk. . . . I am beginning to understand, now," he added, turning again to his companion.

He drank off the contents of his cup, arose, and crossed to the body, which he began at once to search, turning out every pocket as he found it, and discovering nothing. Not until he had pulled the last one out, and with the same result, did he desist. Then, in silence, he returned to his place near the fire.

Jules, who had watched closely his every act, smiled grimly, left his place, and crossed to the body of the dead man. He bent above it, and unfastened one article after another of the clothing that the man had worn, although it was all too scant for protection against the bitter cold to which he had been exposed. Presently Jules bared his left hand and thrust it down against the already stiffened body, and after a moment he found what he sought—a buckskin pouch-belt which Gaffney had worn next to his skin. Jules carried it to Dan and dropped it across his master's knees

without a word, then resumed his seat and poured out still another cupful of the steaming coffee.

Dan regarded the belt wonderingly, touching it with the tips of his mittens, tentatively. He removed the coverings from his hands for a moment and felt along its entire length, satisfying himself of two things; that it contained no coin, but that there was something inside of it, nevertheless.

But he had not the time, nor the inclination, and there was not light enough, to examine the contents of the belt just then, even if the raging wind and the bitter cold had not rendered such an act impracticable. Jules had not stopped to unfasten the buckle in removing the belt from the body of the dead man, but had cut it with his knife, and so Dan rolled and tied it together and hid it away in one of the large pockets of the coat he wore beneath his furs. Then, while he sat quite still, pondering upon this latest incident, Jules finished his coffee, put away the things, bore the dead body into a recess among the rocks, and covered it firmly and effectively.

"En avant, m'sieu," he said, and Dan started to his feet.

"Where are the others, Jules? Where are the men who brought him this far, and who deserted him, and permitted him to freeze?"

Jules waved his arm vaguely toward the eastward, and the summit of the pass; then, as if he already knew what the ensuing question would be, he replied to it before it was spoken.

"Yes, m'sieu. We catch theem," he said. "At de top."

"Let us hurry, then. But tell me, first, how did you know that the dead man wore that belt around his body, next to his skin?"

"M'sieu, men are like the animals. When the stranger approaches too near the place where they raise their young, or the cache where they keep their food, they skulk about an' show their teeth, an' growl ver' mooch. They not like, an' they show they not like. An' the birds, when they have young in the nests, flutter an' cheep-cheep-cheep all around the place, like they was ver' fou; non? Dees man, I see heem at Thompson's hotel, ver' drunk. I see with heem, m'sieu Taggarrr, an' m'sieu Cut'berrr; an' I see m'sieu Taggarrr slap heem on ze shoulder, so; an' leeft him from hees feet, so; an' the bum, he snarl like a bobcat—pssst! —like that, and put hees han' here, so; an' I say to myself, thees: Jules, mon ami, dat bum heem haf moneybelt around heem, what haf no money in eet. Cause why? He no spend money. Den what for the belt? For somet'ngs heem theenk worth more. Voila. I not remember eet again—not unteel I see you go to search hees pockets."

The violence of the wind had increased rather than abated when they went forth again from the shelter of the Devil's Pulpit, but the snowstorm had lessened perceptibly, the clouds had lifted somewhat, and the hidden moon succeeded in forcing a little of its reflected light through them.

It was the very force and strength of the wind that assisted them most in their upward climb, for it had packed the snow solidly where it fell, so that frequently it supported men and dogs and

sled, where otherwise they would have sunk into its depths out of sight.

They dug, and floundered, and fought their way through, from rise to rise, sometimes gliding easily and rapidly over a distance of an eighth of a mile, or more, or less, and again they passed an hour in covering less than half the same distance.

They had no thought of the time. It had been dark at three in the afternoon. It would be light again at nine in the morning, which would be the hour for opening the clerk's office at Magician. Dan Randall intended to be there, if possible, when the office was opened.

CHAPTER XI

The Tragedy at Magician

At the divide—the summit of the pass—there had been erected at some unrecorded time in the past a hut of stones and logs. No windows nor doors had been fitted to the openings left for them, and so it had always stood open to every storm of wind or snow or rain that had hurled itself mercilessly that way. In the summer the stage coach always halted there for a short rest.

When Dan and Jules, after four hours of ceaseless toil against the elements, during which they had covered but little more than two additional miles, approached the Summit house, as it was called, Jules stopped the dogs while yet they were forty rods from it. Then he put his lips close to Dan's ear and shouted, for the velocity of the wind up there rendered it almost impossible to hear a spoken word.

"Ver' like dose men are dere," he said. "We go fin' deem, you say, m'sieu?"

Dan pondered for a moment.

The mere thought of a period of rest, however short, was inviting. It seemed to him that never before had he been so worn. The thongs about his ankles, which held his snowshoes in place, had bitten through the buckskin leggings he wore and

the layers of woolen beneath them, until they had galled into the skin; but so fierce was the cold on the mountain that he was barely conscious of it. He knew only that he was dead tired, that their journey was not yet quite half made, and that the descent of the pass on the opposite side of the mountains would be scarcely less difficult than the ascent had been.

He knew, too, that they could not be far behind Wadleigh and Taggart, with their Indian helper, Lightfoot, and that Jules was probably right in saying that very likely the men were even then beneath the shelter of the Summit house, resting.

That moment of pondering was one of weighing what he conceived to be his real duty, against his inclinations; for every impulse within him urged that he should surprise Wadleigh in the mountain cabin, should charge him with the forgery which Dan now felt certain had been committed, and should openly accuse all of them of the deliberate murder of the man Gaffney.

But such an interruption would inevitably mean a fight, and they would be three against two; and somebody among them would be killed—it would have to be so, under the circumstances.

Nor did Dan Randall consider himself in such a possibility. He had the feeling that is born in some men: that he would live to accomplish what he had set himself to perform. But he had killed one man, before he dropped his last name and became just Dan Randall, and the bitterness of it was terrible; he did not care to repeat the horror of it, and to endure again the unrest that followed as a consequence.

And there was Jules, with Yvonne awaiting his return, and himself responsible for that safe return; and Jules would fight for him with all the wiry strength he possessed—and might be the one to die. Moreover, there was the duty that had called him over the Lantowa mountains in the bitter cold—and the greater task beyond it, that he had set for himself. To build the "Janver Cut-off" across two mountain passes—through Badger range by way of the Black gorge, to the westward, and over Magician pass of the Lantowa—the fruit of his meditation and map-study while he had awaited the return of Jules, in Ace Wadleigh's room.

It was strange that he had never thought of that before, with all its immense possibilities; stranger still that he should think of it again, just then, at the summit of Magician pass, while the wind hurled itself against his tall body at the rate of seventy miles an hour, with a temperature of fifty below zero biting at his flesh and bones, and benumbing him. He bent his head and shouted back to Jules:

"Is there a way around, that we can follow, and pass them?"

"Oui." Jules turned toward the dogs. "Allez! Moosh! Ar-rrr!" he shouted at them, and they started on again, bearing off toward the right, and away from the house at the summit. "Eet ees close to de house, but eet ees with de weend. They weel not hear us."

They passed, presently, within a hundred yards of the hut, and they could smell the smoke of a fire that had been lighted there; and once Dan thought

that he caught a glimmer of its light through the mass of driving snow, for up there at the top of the pass it was as thick as a blanket.

Dan reached out and touched Jules on the shoulder; and the latter bent to listen.

"You go back, Jules, and find out what they are doing. Then follow after me, quickly. I know the way back to the trail. Moosh!" he cried at the dogs, which had also caught the scent of the fire, and would have turned toward it.

Dan knew that Jules would follow after, presently, when he had performed the duty assigned to him, for the trapper could make greater speed alone on his snowshoes than they were making with the dogs and sledge. Indeed, they both might have made better time across the mountains without that impediment but for the fact that without it they might never have succeeded in making the crossing at all, and if disabled, must have perished without the huskies, and the blankets, and provisions, and tools that were packed on the sled.

Dan did know the way back to the trail, and found it; and the fury of the wind lessened for a time, so that he made fairly good headway down the mountain Nor did he give another thought to Jules until he had covered more than another mile, and paused to speak to his companion, whom he supposed was directly behind him by that time.

But Jules was not there, and he stopped, amazed that he was not. But even as he hesitated, and was on the point of turning backward, the figure of Jules loomed through the snow, like some gigantic thing approaching.

"C'est bon," he said, without pausing, and

shouted at the dogs. A moment later he added: "Tout a la. They all dere, m'sieu. Je sui content. Non? Et vous? They sleep. We mak' speed now, down de mountain."

It was difficult to talk in that wind. Dan heard only sufficient to understand that Jules had found Wadleigh and the others sleeping, and had hurried on.

It was daylight when they staggered across the barren stretch that was between the foot of the mountain and Magician, but lights still gleamed from several windows, when, at last, they began to pass by the outlying houses of the town.

Straight toward the center of it Dan led the way, so exhausted that he could barely keep up the effort; and he made the last turn which would bring them directly to the building where the clerk's office was located, and where he expected to find his friend, Sam Sutherland, on duty, at the office of registry.

But as he made that last turn he stopped; and he put up one hand to his eyes as if to rub away the vision of the thing he thought he saw—a heap of smouldering ashes above the ruin of what had been the building he sought.

The fire had raged early on the preceding day, evidently, or during the night before that, for the driving snow of last night's storm had encroached upon the rapidly cooling ashes in many places. Dan turned wearily away from the sight of it.

A man stepped outside of a door across the way and called to him, then hurriedly retreated inside again, for the cold was of the kind that bites like an animal. The dogs had already stretched them-

selves upon the hard snow, utterly exhausted, but Jules called sharply to them and they got up again.

"You go, m'sieu," he said to Dan. "I come back bimeby, an' fin' you, apres I half cared for de dogs. Sacrrrr-r! Eet ees ver' mooch colt."

Dan left him and staggered through the doorway that was pulled open for him as he approached it. The man who had called to him was an acquaintance. He told his news almost in a breath, and Dan listened dully.

"Good heavens, man, do you mean to tell me that you have crossed the pass from Janver through the big storm of last night? And you are alive to tell of it? You were looking for Sutherland, weren't you? Poor chap. There isn't much left of him, now. He was burned up in the fire, night before last. We didn't know, till afterward, that he was inside; but we couldn't have got him out if we had known."

Dan sank down upon a bench that was near him. The heat of the room, after the intense cold and the utter fatigue that he had so long endured, overwhelmed him but he comprehended in a vague sort of way that his friend whom he had crossed the mountain to see, had perished in the fire that had destroyed the building in which had been registered all of the records for that part of the province.

His informant brought him a glassful of white whiskey diluted with much water, and made him swallow it, while he went on with his information.

"Sam boozed too much, as you know, Dan," he said. "That night there was a card party and Sam went away about three in the morning,

drunker than usual. They think he fell against the table, or something like that, and overturned the lamp, and that he did not have sense enough to pick it up and chuck it outside, in the snow. Anyhow, the building was a seething furnace before anybody knew what had happened. And afterward, they didn't find very much of him; only just enough to know that he had been there. Poor old Sam. He was a good chap too."

"And the records?" Dan asked, but without particular interest. His utter weariness was too profound.

"Records!" replied Buxton. "There aren't any records, now."

CHAPTER XII

"I Will Stay Here—and Fight"

The white-wheat whiskey which Randall had swallowed, and the information which Buxton gave him, roused him from the lethargy into which he was falling. He started to his feet, and then sank down again as Buxton came swiftly toward him and began to remove the furs. Even Dan's snowshoes were still fast upon his feet. Buxton worked rapidly, but silently, while Dan was recovering his mental and physical poise, and the wonderful recuperative power which Nature had bestowed upon Randall asserted itself.

After a little time Buxton began and kept up a running talk of immaterial information about the fire, and its consequences, but all the while the salient facts that Sutherland was dead, and that the records had been destroyed, were uppermost in Randall's mind.

All record of the deeds which would give to him the undisputed right of way over Magician pass, had been burned, and the deeds themselves, which had been recorded, and to which fact Sutherland alone might have testified, were in the possession of Wadleigh; and Wadleigh without doubt had other deeds made out to himself, or to the M. & J. railroad company of which he was now the president, signed with Randall's name.

Forgeries they were, to be sure; but—— and that small word represented an uncertainty which was exceedingly grave.

Might made right to a great degree in that country, at that time. Saskatchewan was almost out of the world; and Dan Randall, with all his hopes and ambitions, was in Saskatchewan.

"The wires are down between here and Janver, or I would have telegraphed," he said to Buxton, presently, offering the first explanation of his presence that he had suggested. "Let me understand you now, clearly, Buxton. Were all the records destroyed?"

"Everything, Dan."

"Then I will tell you something that you don't know. Sutherland had just recorded for me the documents which gave to me, personally, the right of way to build a railroad over Magician pass, to Janver. I secured them after a great deal of difficulty, and at considerable expense, and I have kept very still about it because I did not wish the information of what I was doing to leak out, until it was accomplished. I did not want the C. P. and the other big fellows to know what I was doing until I was ready to have them know it."

"Well, you can get substitutes for the documents, can't you, and have them properly recorded at Regina?" Buxton asked.

"I don't know. I doubt it. . . . I think that you are my friend, Buxton, and that I can depend upon you as such. Can I?"

"Try me, old chap," was the hearty and instant reply. "There is my hand on it. My best effort goes with it, if you need me."

"Thank you, Bux. I was sure of it. Wadleigh and I have parted. Last night, at the office in Janver, I gave him a thrashing, but I did not know, even when I did it, that he was quite as bad as he is. Wait. He has stolen every one of the documents which convey that route over the pass to me. More than that, he has now in his possession, so I am convinced, forged deeds purporting to be executed by me, which will rob me of it, if they go through. He started over the pass before I did, last night, with Ben Taggart, and Lightfoot —and they took with them the man who actually committed the forgeries; the man who was the only one who could have done it."

"Rather a mixed-up mess, isn't it, Dan? But Wadleigh hasn't got in yet."

"No. Jules and I passed them at the Summit house. Gaffney, the forger, we found dead, at the Pulpit. He had frozen to death. There isn't any doubt that Wadleigh intended that he should, and took him over the pass with him for that purpose; to get rid of him. This fire, happening as it did, supplies a remarkable coincidence, Buxton. If it weren't for the fact that Wadleigh made the effort he did, to get here, I should be inclined to think that he might be, in some way, responsible for it."

"Good lord, man! Do you mean that? If he is——"

"Wait. We mustn't jump at conclusions."

"No. You are right. But it will be short shrift for Ace Wadleigh if I find out that that is so. Sam Sutherland had his faults, but he was my friend. Go on Dan. What else is there to tell me?"

"I must go south this very day. Is the line open to Lonecamp?"

"It was, until last night. They had just cleared it from the last storm. But that one last night must have filled it in again, worse than ever. It's a safe bet that there won't be a wheel over the road for three or four days, at the least."

"Nevertheless, I must go. I must get to Regina."

"Man alive, it's three hundred miles. It's fifty from here to Lonecamp by the trail, a hundred more to Saskatoon, and a hundred and fifty from there to Regina. It would all be easy enough if the railroads were open, but they're not. Besides, what could you accomplish if you got there? You haven't anything to record, according to your own statement. And Wadleigh could chase along after you as soon as the road is open and put it all over you with the papers you say he's got. You can bet your life on that!"

"I can find competent lawyers there and they will tell me what to do. I can file affidavits that will act as estoppels. I can——"

"You can get yourself jolly well laughed at, Dan, and that is all you can do," Buxton interrupted. "You are helpless without the documents that you say Wadleigh has stolen. You are still more so, because of the forged documents, if the forgeries are well done, as I imagine them to be. And you tell me that the forger is dead. Besides, I don't believe you could get through; and, if you did, there would be a new record office started here before you could get back, and Wadleigh would get in ahead of you, with what he's got, and

your fat would be in the fire. And there's another thing: Last night's storm was the last of the season—anyhow, that's what the weather sharps say about it. The big thaw will hit us inside of a week, and the rains will come, and Ace Wadleigh will be on the mountain the minute he can get there, if I know anything about his capabilities. Stay here and fight it out, man."

"What have I got to fight with?"

"Your hands, and your brains; your muscles, and your intelligence—and your friends. And you've got a heap of those. . . . Don't you realize, Dan, that the big fellows are behind this? Ace Wadleigh would never have undertaken this business alone. He's got backing, and good backing, he believes, behind him, or he wouldn't have touched it with the end of a bull-whip. You can bet your bottom dollar that old man Gregory is engineering this deal, Dan. Stay here and fight it out."

"Gregory!" Randall repeated, and started. "The P. & H. B.?"

"Surest thing you know. At least that's the way it looks to me. If I wasn't convinced of it before, I would be now, after your suggestion about the fire. Tell me this: Did Wadleigh know that you were after that route over the pass, until after you had got your hands on it?"

"No; nor anybody else. I worked that thing entirely alone."

"Why?"

"Because, in the beginning, I wasn't at all sure that I could get it, and I didn't care to be made sport of if I failed. But the minute I had the thing

cinched, I told him about it, and that I intended to turn it over to the company."

"I see. Then you did not know that the P. & H. B. people were only waiting for the snow to disappear to start in on that very thing, themselves?"

"No. I had no thought of such a thing. Certainly I didn't know it, or guess it."

"Ace Wadleigh knew it."

"Perhaps."

"I know that he did. He was here just before that other storm. Gregory's secretary, Clifford, dropped in upon us the same day. He had been going over their own lines, he said, and came around this way from Carrolton. The meeting between them looked like an accidental one, and I would have thought it such if I hadn't been put wise. They sat up together nearly the whole night at the McDougall house—and you can bet your sweet life they didn't do that for the mere pleasure they could find in each other's company; not when one of them works for Gregory and is the craftiest little cuss that wasn't born an Indian. Sandy McPherson, who is the new clerk at the McDougall, and who is an old acquaintance of mine, heard Clifford say to Wadleigh, as they were bidding each other good-bye the next morning, that he'd meet him here as soon as the snow melted, and go over the pass with him. If you can see through a millstone with a hole in it, there is one."

"You're right, Buxton," said Dan. "It was the same night that Wadleigh got back to Janver from that trip that I told him about what I had done, and I thought he received the intelligence

with something like a shock. That explains it. I wonder——"

He stopped suddenly and thrust a hand into his pocket to get the map that he had torn from the wall in Wadleigh's room. But it came into contact with something else that he had forgotten, and he brought out not only the folded map, but also the specie-belt which Jules Legarde had taken from the dead man's body, on the mountain.

Dan gazed at it an instant, then laid it aside.

"I'll examine that belt, presently," he said. "Jules took it from the poor chap we found at Devil's Pulpit. Just now I have got something else on my mind." He opened the folds of the map and spread it across his knees, giving the opposite end of it to Buxton. Then he placed his thumb and fingers upon it as he had done in Wadleigh's room in Janver. He rested his forefinger upon Janver, put his thumb upon Allerton, and his little finger upon Magician. The north side of the map was toward Buxton.

"Look at the map, Bux," he said, his whole mind intent upon the great project. "There is Allerton, beneath my thumb. The P. & H. B. enters Allerton from the west, and strikes out southeasterly from there, around the south spur of the Badger range, and by a crescent course finally makes Lonecamp, which is directly south of Magician, where we are now. The B. S. & L. S. is building an extension into Allerton from the northwest, and will complete it and open it this summer. Now look northeast from Allerton, to Carrolton, which is the present terminal of the Manitoba & Juneau, of which I was president, and which I con-

trolled, until yesterday. We were going to build into Allerton this coming summer, as you know. Now look down along the existing line of the M. & J. from Carrolton to Janver, and thence follow an imaginary line across Magician pass to Magician. Don't you see that the cut-off will render the present line around through Rickett's canyon to Magician practically useless and that there will not, after that, be any earthly need of building into Allerton from Carrolton. The outlet from Carrolton to the states by way of Janver and the cut-off, and through Magician, and Lonecamp, will be much shorter and better than the projected one to Allerton, to connect there with the P. & H. B.

"But there is another point. What is the matter with another cut-off between Allerton and Janver, through Black gorge? Oh, it can be done. I've been over the ground, and I know. I'm an engineer, and I ought to know. Allerton and Magician are located directly west and east of each other. Janver is on a straight line drawn from one to the other, a third of the distance nearer to Magician. From Allerton to Janver, around by way of Carrolton, the distance is a hundred and thirty-four miles. The distance between Allerton and Janver by Black gorge is about thirty-five or forty miles, as the road would run. The distance from Janver to Magician by the present route through Rickett's canyon is sixty-nine miles, but the distance between the same points, by way of the pass, will be about eighteen miles, including the distance between Janver and Bluerock. So, at the most, with those two cut-offs built, the haul between Allerton and Magician would not exceed

sixty miles, whereas now, and with the projected extension between Allerton and Carrolton it figures up two hundred and three miles. There is the map. Look at it, Bux."

"Holy smoke!" Buxton exclaimed. "You'd drain every shipment from the northwest by the B. S. & L. S.! You'd force the P. & H. B. to abandon, almost, their line around the south spur of the Badgers to Lonecamp, and you'd get all of the Carrolton shipments."

"That isn't all, either, Bux. Think of the riches we are likely to uncover in that Black gorge project."

"I have thought of it. I am wondering, now, about another thing which perhaps you have not thought about, Dan."

"What is that?"

"Why, man alive, you'll bankrupt your own property! You'll put the M. & J. out of business if you do all that."

"In the first place, Bux, that is precisely what I intend to do; and in the second place, the M. & J. is *not* my property, now. It has been stolen from me, lock, stock and barrel."

"But your stock, man. They couldn't steal that from you."

"Yes, they could—and did."

"How?"

"For reasons of my own, I had placed everything in the name of Joyce Maitland. It is enough for me to say, at present, and you will understand, when I tell you that she has thrown all of it into the lap of Ace Wadleigh. . . . There, there; I see what is on your mind to say; but don't say it.

The conspiracy has been a deliberate one, well planned, and perfectly executed. I had sufficient proof of it, yesterday. What you have told me in regard to the meeting between Clifford and Wadleigh, and the probable interest of Gregory and the P. & H. B., in the matter, is only an added circumstance. Old Lionel Gregory is Miss Maitland's relative, and Clifford, his secretary, would readily become her slave if she asked it of him. A moment ago you twice said to me, 'Stay here and fight.' Well, I will stay here and fight—to a finish. Do you want to go into the fight with me, Bux?"

"I do—if you will take me. I haven't much money, you know."

"You've got brains, and pluck; and you're loyal and square. And I can find the money. I know how to do that. Will you stick?"

"To the last ditch, Dan."

"Knowing that Joyce Maitland is opposed to us? Knowing that she is with the other side?"

"I'll stick, Dan, until the end," was the slow reply, although Buxton's face paled somewhat as he said it.

Their hands were still clasped in the closing of the compact when the door was thrown open, and Jules Legarde glided into their presence. He closed the door quickly, and stood still, with his back against it.

"M'sieu, hide yourself, bientôt—prompt. Those men, Wadleigh et Taggarrr, are ici. They comme to thees place now, to geet you, m'sieu. They haf been to de police and swear you keel de bum—heem we find. They say you robbed also hees dead

body. I not heear mooch. Mais, they breeng de body avec them, to Magicienne. Voila! They mak' de charge avoir de dessus. The officers they come, maintenant. You hide. They tak' moi, too, mabby, but Jules not care. Voila tout!"

CHAPTER XIII

Two Packets in Oilskins

Dan Randall started to his feet when Jules burst into the room, and he understood instantly what had happened. He could see it all, intuitively, as plainly as if he had seen it actually.

One of the three men at the Summit house had seen Randall passing, or had discovered Jules when he returned to spy upon them. Taggart, or Lightfoot, had gone back to the Devil's Pulpit to find out if Gaffney had been rescued, or, in case he had perished, if the body had been discovered. Wadleigh had been astute enough to turn what might have been a calamity for him into an advantage. They had found that Gaffney's pouch-belt was missing, and that the body had been covered up with the cord-wood that was stored in the hollow—and so Wadleigh had brought the dead Gaffney into Magician with him, had taken the body straight to the mounted police, to charge Randall and Jules with the crime of murder. The irony of the circumstance was in the fact that not one of them had suspected that Gaffney had worn such a belt until it was too late to possess themselves of it.

The belt, which Randall had not yet examined, was upon a chair beside him when Jules gave the

alarm. With a quick act of inspiration, he seized it, doubled it in his grasp, and tossed it upon the top of a row of shelves that lined one side of the room. It dropped down behind some pasteboard boxes which were there, and was hidden from view. Buxton nodded, understandingly. Then Randall sprang to the door, and put the bar across it. He seized Jules by the arm and drew him toward the back of the room, motioning to Buxton to follow, and to listen.

"You must go, Jules, not I," he said, rapidly. "You must get back to Janver. It must be done, and you can do it. *Can* you do it?"

"Oui, m'sieu. But I will go alone. Without the chiens. But why?"

"You must get everything that is mine out of the house where I have been living, and move all of it to the stone house at White Lake. And you must take Yvonne, and go there to live. But most of all, you must find a way to get from my office, on the square, the small leather satchel which I brought back with me to Janver, night before last. I left it on the floor behind the door in the little room, off from the big office-room, and I had totally forgotten it until this moment, when I am in danger of arrest. It is that fact that has brought it to mind. It is for that satchel that I send you back. Get it at all hazards, and keep it safely for me. Go, now." Dan opened the back door of the building, and Jules passed outside, murmuring as he went:

"Oui, m'sieu. Eet ees fait accompli."

There was a loud summons at the front door as Randall and Buxton turned back again into the

room, and the latter lifted his eyes to Dan's inquiringly.

"I am going to give them something to arrest me for—something real, Buxton," Dan said, speaking rapidly. "I will open the door. You keep close to me. I shall attack Wadleigh the instant he gets within my reach. But not for the purpose of hurting him. Don't get that idea into your head. There isn't a particle of animus about this. It is all craft. Just craft, Buxton. I want to get those forged deeds away from him. . . . All right! In a moment!" he called out, loudly, to those outside the door, who had redoubled their banging upon it. "I know where he carries papers, and such things, when he has them with him. I shall maul him, and tear some of his clothing off of him, before the others can prevent it. If you should see a garment, or a package of papers or anything of the sort, fly across the room, GET IT; *and keep it, somehow.* If I can get those forged deeds away from him, we will be on even ground."

Randall stepped forward, swiftly, toward the door. He threw down the bar, and opened it. Wadleigh stood there, close beside the red-coated representative of the law. Behind the two loomed Taggart; and beyond him Lightfoot stood with folded arms.

As Dan had anticipated, it was Wadleigh who pushed forward when the door was opened. Randall used all of his great strength in the consummation of what followed, and so quickly did he act that there was not time nor opportunity for interference.

He seized Wadleigh and jerked him into the

room; he kicked the heavy door shut in the faces of the others. He tore at Wadleigh's furs, ripping the hood and the coat off of him in a twinkling. Then he struck him full in the face with the pad of his hand, and as Wadleigh fell, Dan reached down inside of the torn waistcoat, seized a package that was there, wrapped in oilskin, and hurled it toward the far end of the room. And in the confusion incident to the attack, together with the blinding blow in the face, Wadleigh was totally unaware of his loss.

Dan released his hold at the same moment he struck the blow and secured the packet of papers. He threw Wadleigh backward and away from him, and into the grasp of the red-coated policeman who had opened the door again and entered the store.

Dan straightened himself, folded his arms, and said, coolly:

"I am sorry, Sergeant Hurley. I'm afraid that I did not realize the fact that you were present. But the attack was not without provocation, Sergeant. Wadleigh has broken every law of friendship with me, and last night, he, with Taggart and Lightfoot, committed a deliberate murder. He——"

"You're an infernal liar, Randall, an' you know it!" Taggart interrupted.

"Silence!" ordered the policeman. "Mr. Randall, you are under arrest. There are sworn charges filed against you—and I fear that just now you have given occasion for further charges, for an apparently unprovoked assault upon Mr. Wadleigh."

Wadleigh, who had been assisted to his feet by Buxton, and who was now readjusting his torn clothing, cried out suddenly, and sprang like an enraged cat toward Randall; but he was thrust back again by the sturdy sergeant.

"He has robbed me, as well as assaulted me!" Wadleigh called out, white with fury.

"The man is mad," said Dan, shrugging his shoulders.

"He has stolen my papers—my deeds. I had them, wrapped in oilskin, in this pocket. He took them when he attacked me just now," Wadleigh insisted; and he began at once to search about on the floor for the packet. Lightfoot and Taggart, and even Buxton, assisted him. They pulled out boxes and peered behind them. They sprang over the counter that occupied one side of the long room, and searched on the floor behind it. They looked along the shelves where the packet might have been hurled in the struggle. And then Buxton uttered a shout that called their united attention toward him.

He was standing before the open door of the huge stove that heated the big room. He pointed at the fire that burned within it, fiercely hot. Something was there, blazing merrily, and curling beneath the great heat, and it needed only a glance to determine that it had once been a packet of papers wrapped in oilskin that was now being so rapidly consumed.

Wadleigh leaped forward as if to thrust his hand into the fiery furnace. He withdrew it, scorched. He seized upon an iron poker and attempted to throw the burning papers from the fire with it—

and failed. He grasped a pair of tongs from the zinc under the stove, and attempted to lift them out, but the object crumbled, and fell apart, and burned the more fiercely.

Wadleigh stared at the sight of it, recovering his coolness,, and already trying to plan how he might overcome such a disaster. He had no idea that Randall suspected what the papers had been. Taggart cursed loudly, and roundly, and he rushed forward and planted his huge fist squarely in Randall's face before anybody suspected his intention.

Dan staggered backward under the force of the blow, which would have stunned another man.

The act, and the smarting effect of it, roused all of the fury that was latent in his naturally violent temper. He forgot the surroundings, and the power of the Northwest Mounted Police which was present in the person of Sergeant Hurley. He was, on the instant, uncontrollable, and beyond the power of self-control.

He sprang upon Taggart, and they clinched, evenly matched in size, almost so in strength. They rolled upon the floor tearing at each other, Taggart enveloped in his furs, Randall stripped down to his house clothing. The others, even Wadleigh—even the sergeant—looked on in amazement at the unlooked-for struggle of the two big men.

Then the sergeant made an effort to separate them, to tear them apart; but Taggart's foot dealt Hurley an unintentional blow which sent him spinning backward, across the floor.

Randall somehow got his right hand inside the furs at Taggart's throat, and the ex-lumberjack's

jaw fell open as he gasped for breath. But Dan only squeezed the harder, and Taggart was growing black in the face when the others rushed in upon them in a body, and tore Randall loose.

Then it was, when they were endeavoring to restore Taggart to his senses, that a second packet, also wrapped in oilskin, fell from Taggart's person to the floor, unnoticed by all save Sergeant Hurley, who picked it up, and dropped it into his pouch-bag.

Why he did that he perhaps could not have told, save only that he wished to bring the existing scene to a close as soon as possible. The packet he had found could wait. He turned toward Dan, who was recovering, slowly, from the effect of his rage.

"Randall, put on your furs and come with me," he ordered.

Dan looked first at him, then around at Buxton, half stupidly.

"Go ahead, old chap," Buxton said, stepping forward and putting a hand upon Dan's shoulder. "The charge, whatever it is, won't amount to anything I'll see you through."

With a deep drawn sigh Randall recovered.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I had forgotten. All right, Buxton, and thank you. Sergeant Hurley, I am at your service—and I beg your pardon, too, for appearing to resist your authority. I did not mean it so."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing that *I* mean, Dan Randall," Taggart shouted. "I'll get your everlastin' goat for this! Yeh can bank on that. I'll have the courage out of you first, and the life out

of you before I'm done with you, or my name's not Ben Taggart,'' the bully panted at Dan from the chair where he was slowly recovering from the effects of the choking he had received.

Randall made no reply. He adjusted his furs, and, after a moment, followed the sergeant from Buxton's store.

Wadleigh and Lightfoot went along.

Buxton, left alone, stared at the fire in the stove, poked at the cinders, thoughtfully; and, oddly enough, he chuckled audibly.

CHAPTER XIV

A Conspiracy That Failed

No human being not inured to the intense cold of the North, and who had not experienced a life-long training in endurance and sustained effort, would have dared to undertake the task that Randall set for Jules Legarde that fateful day. Much less could there have been hope of success in the undertaking for a person less thoroughly equipped than he, for the task.

The word "failure" was not contained in Jules' lexicon. His ready reply to any task which his beloved master might set for him was, invariably, "Eet ees fait accompli," and his simple, direct, loyal soul could have comprehended no other climax.

When he was so summarily thrust from the rear doorway of Buxton's store, and commanded to fight his way over Magician pass again, before he had been given time to recover from the great effort of the preceding night, there was no thought in his mind of the hardships to be endured, or of the fatigue that he must have felt because of what he had already accomplished. Over there, across the mountains, were duties to be performed. That was all.

The dogs he did not want. He knew that he could make the journey much quicker without

them, particularly, now that it was daylight. Jules knew how to fight his own way through the snows quite as well as they did. For the return he would need no tools nor emergency accessories, such as had been necessary for the night-trip, and with the m'sieu to care for.

His snowshoes had been strapped to his shoulders when he entered the store. He knelt beneath the shelter of the shed and adjusted them as soon as Buxton closed the door after him. Then, just at the moment when Randall, inside of the store, seized Wadleigh to tear the furs off of him in order to procure the packet of deeds, Jules sped away through the crisp morning air toward the mountains.

Jules had fortified himself with food since his arrival at Magician. His first care had been for the dogs; his second, for himself. Then, returning to Buxton's store, where he knew he would find the m'sieu awaiting him, he had come upon the knowledge of the sworn charge which Wadleigh and the others were making against Dan Randall.

Now, when he faced the journey across the mountain pass again his spirits were strong, his powers of endurance were not in the least impaired, and, save for the predicament which confronted his master, his heart would have been light and happy. For, was not little Yvonne over there, at the other side of the mountain, awaiting him?

As for Randall's predicament—ah, bah! That would amount to nothing, he told himself. He had the same faith in m'sieu that he had in himself; and both were infinite.

It was nearly eleven o'clock in the forenoon when he set out. By three in the afternoon, or soon after that hour, it would be dark again. But he only shrugged his massive shoulders and went on the faster, when he thought of that. He had covered greater distances in less time, and had surmounted even more formidable obstacles in doing so. He was as fleet as a hare, on snowshoes, when the going was to his liking.

Had Jules, by any chance, known about the adventure that Joyce Maitland had undertaken the preceding evening, he would not, even then, have hastened his movements by so much as an added effort. Long years of experience had taught him the limits of sustained exertion in travelling through the cold and snow. He had learned the lesson of husbanding his strength. Yet, he, as well as Yvonne, had read between the lines in the open book of love between Dan Randall and Joyce.

Never once, as he sped forward, did he pause for breath, nor to look backward over the path he had followed. His effort was On, on, on, with never a halt nor a hesitation, and with speed that was amazing.

Within the store, Burchard Buxton stood quite alone, by the time that Jules had achieved the beginning of the pass.

He stood before the glowing fire in the stove, looking down upon the white cinders of the packet that had been consumed, and he chuckled again and again at some vision which seemed to shape itself into definite outline among the red-hot coals.

But not for long. It would have been apparent to one observing Buxton, just then, that he was

determining some perplexing question, and that, ere long, he solved it to his own satisfaction; for not many minutes had passed after the departure of Randall in the custody of the sergeant, before he sought his own furs, donned them, and went out.

Randall had just completed the relation of his account of the night on the mountain, and the finding of Gaffney's body, when Buxton entered the station. The officer in charge, with Wadleigh's sworn statement in his hand, remarked, dryly:

"Your account of the affair seems sufficiently clear, Mr. Randall. Save for two apparently minor circumstances, it agrees with this statement of Mr. Wadleigh's."

"Permission has not been given me to examine that statement, sir," Randall replied. "I might answer it more to the point if I knew what it contained."

"All in good time."

"What are the two circumstances to which you refer, if I may ask?" Randall inquired.

"One of them is the absence from the room, now, of the man who accompanied you over the mountain—one Jules Legarde. Where is he?"

"I have sent him back to Janver, captain."

"When did you do that?"

"A few moments only before the arrival at Buxton's store, of Sergeant Hurley, to put me under arrest."

"Why did you send the man back to Janver so soon after he had made the perilous passage across the mountain with you?"

"Because of an important matter that I had forgotten, in the haste of my own departure, yesterday."

"Will you state, under oath, that his going away at this time had nothing to do with the grave charges that have been laid against both of you?"

"Yes, sir. And, captain, if I may suggest a thought to you, is it likely that I would have sent him away, in the face of such charges as these, if it had occurred to me that I would need him to corroborate my statements to you?"

"No. Are you willing to tell me exactly what the business is that you sent him upon?"

"Yes." Randall turned for an instant toward Wadleigh, and there was the glint of a fleeting smile in his eyes as he continued, still addressing the major. "Mr. Wadleigh and I have been occupying the same offices, in Janver, as you know. I had only just returned to Janver, from Carrolton, when the necessity arose that sent me here. I had brought back with me a small satchel, which I left behind the door in my office. The satchel contains letters, documents, and other personal effects, that are valuable to me. They might likewise interest Mr. Wadleigh, considering the present strained relations between us. But they are my private, personal property, and I sent Jules Legarde to get the satchel. That is the only part of his errand which could interest any person present in this room."

"This dead man was called Peter Gaffney. Did you know him?"

"No. I had never even heard of him until

Jules Legarde, in a conversation between us before we started across the mountain, referred to him as the 'bum.' "

"He was still living, when you found him at Devil's Pulpit?"

"Alive, but not conscious. He died, almost at once. I regretted that we attempted to revive him. He recovered only sufficiently to be conscious of suffering. Then—he died."

"Did you examine the body of the dead man, Mr. Randall?"

"No. I did search through his pockets, if that is what you mean."

"Did you remove anything from them?"

"I did not. There was nothing to remove. If Gaffney's pockets had contained anything of value, or of interest, it had been removed before we found him."

"Did you take away a pouch-belt which Gaffney is said to have worn, strapped around his waist, inside of his clothing?"

"I did not. There was such a belt, I believe. Jules discovered it after I had gone through the dead man's pockets and found them empty. He cut it from the body, and brought it to me."

"What did you do with it?"

"I threw it from me. I could not say exactly where it fell. Doubtless a careful search would rediscover it." Dan did not regard it as necessary, under the circumstances, to state exactly when and where he had thrown away the belt.

"Do you mean that you threw it away without having examined it, Mr. Randall?"

"I do mean exactly that. I felt of it, on the

outside, discovered that it contained no coin, and decided that it was empty and worthless."

"But it might have held paper money, or documents of value, eh?"

"It might have. I cannot say as to that. I did not search. But, considering the general appearance of the man who had worn it, I should regard it as extremely doubtful that he carried anything of value on his person."

"Will you swear that Jules Legarde has not that belt in his possession?"

"Yes, sir. I will swear that he did not have it in his possession for more than a moment, that he passed it directly to me as soon as he had removed it from the body, and that his hands did not again touch it. Also, that I threw the belt away from me, as I have stated, and that Jules does not know, even now, that I did so, for he did not see the act. And now, sir, will you permit me to make a further statement in connection with the finding of Peter Gaffney, at Devil's Pulpit?"

"Certainly. What is it?"

"It is not likely that Mr. Wadleigh, or Mr. Taggart, or the 'breed' who is called Lightfoot, will deny that they took Gaffney over the pass with them. They cannot deny that the man was imperfectly clad for such an adventure, and that his life was as good as sacrificed the moment they permitted him to start out with them on such a journey. Gaffney's death was the result of exposure. You know what Magician pass is like, as well as I do, or better, on such a night as last night was."

The red-coated official nodded his head with emphasis. Randall went on:

"If any person other than himself is responsible for his death, it is the man, or the men, who permitted him to start on that journey. I quite agree with the charge, as made in this case, insofar as the word murder is used. But the charge should apply to the men who took him to Devil's Pulpit; not to those who found him there, dying."

The grizzled official in the red coat smiled grimly. He leaned partly across the low table at which he was seated, and began slowly to remove some paper wrappings from an article that he held in his hand. Randall watched him with interest, for he had no notion what the package might contain.

After a moment a sheathless hunting-knife was revealed, and the captain, after lifting it in his hand and balancing it for a moment, extended it toward Randall.

"Take this in your hand, look at it closely, and tell me if you recognize it, Mr. Randall," he said.

Dan accepted it, held it before his eyes, studied it carefully, then laid it down upon the table. Instead of replying directly to the officer, he turned half around and looked at Wadleigh, then at Taggart, and then at Lightfoot. Then he returned his gaze to the red-coated official.

"Well, sir?" the officer asked.

"I recognized the hunting knife the instant you removed the wrapping from it," Randall replied. "It is one that formerly belonged to me. I gave it to Mr. Wadleigh, several months ago. I have not seen it since. May I ask what the hunting knife has to do with the present inquiry?"

"It was found in the body of the dead man. He

had been stabbed through the heart with it," was the slow reply.

"Precisely," Randall said, quickly. "The dead man had been. The living man had not been stabbed. Nor could the knife have been used upon him until hours after he was dead. I suspected something of this sort, sir, the moment you unwrapped that paper. I assume that this is the other circumstance to which you referred a little while ago. Is it so?"

"Yes."

"Then, sir, you need only to examine the weapon, to convince yourself of the truth of what I say."

"I have examined it," the officer said.

Dan Randall, forgetful for the moment that he was a prisoner under charges, wheeled upon his accusers, stared at them, one after another, and then turned abruptly back again.

"A moment ago I might have charged Ace Wadleigh with instigating this attack upon me," he said; "but he is much too smart to have made such a blunder as this one is. Taggart has too much sense, too, to father such a fool-effort to create a murder charge. And one would suppose that Lightfoot's training would have kept *him* from doing so. But, sir, it is as plain as day that one of the three used that knife upon the body of Peter Gaffney. Not while he was alive. Not while the body still remained at Devil's Pulpit. But since it has been brought here, to Magician. What is your own opinion of the matter, sir?"

"My own opinion need not be stated at the pres-

ent time, Mr. Randall. It is sufficient that there is not enough foundation for the charge that has been made against you to hold you. Not only your own relation of the circumstances, but this sworn statement that I hold in my hand, exonerates you. You are discharged from custody, so far as the death of Peter Gaffney is concerned. There is still another charge against you, however. I will take that up presently."

"Very well, captain. I thank you."

"Before we dismiss the present question," the grizzled old captain of the N. W. M. P. continued, "I have one more thing to say concerning it. I address each of you three white men, in saying what I do."

"Very well, sir," Dan replied. Wadleigh and Taggart remained silent. Indeed, their continued silence during the examination had surprised Dan throughout it.

"The charge, the methods followed in making it, the haste made by both parties in crossing the pass last night, the scene which occurred at Buxton's store a little while ago—the entire list of circumstances, in fact, suggest to me that there is distinct animus behind this affair. It is not within my province, however, to investigate that. But it is within my province, and it is also my duty, to say this: I do not think, Mr. Randall, that you should hold either Mr. Wadleigh, or Mr. Taggart, accountable, wholly, for this charge against you which I have now dismissed. It so happens that I personally saw that hunting-knife in the possession of the 'breed,' Lightfoot, three weeks ago, in Janver. I quite agree with you in your opinion

that neither Mr. Wadleigh nor Mr. Taggart, even had they been so disposed, would have committed such a blunder as the presence of that blade in the dead body of Gaffney would suggest. Personally, I doubt their disposition to do so.

"But"—the captain leaned forward, partly across the table again—"there can be no doubt that Lightfoot could explain the circumstance of the knife, if he cared to do so. The whole matter is up to you, Mr. Randall. If you care to make a charge against Lightfoot, I will hold him for trial. Otherwise——"

"Let him go, captain," Randall interrupted. "I might suggest that he was only a tool, who had blundered in carrying out his instructions; but I could not prove it. If any inquiry at all should follow upon this one, it should originate with the proper authorities, and should deal only with Gaffney's presence on the mountain, and with the fact that he was deserted, while still alive, at Devil's Pulpit."

The captain tapped the affidavit with the tips of his fingers.

"That is included in this sworn statement," he said. "It appears, here, that Gaffney had foolishly started out alone, to cross the pass, that the deponents came upon him after they had entered the defile, and that they had no other course at the time than to take him with them, and that, when they left him at the pulpit, they were convinced that he would be comparatively safe until their return; also, that they provided him with blankets, fire, and food. To have brought him on, across the mountain, would have meant certain death to

him. Have you anything to say as to all that, Mr. Randall?''

''Nothing, sir.'' Randall realized how useless it would be to attempt denial of those false statements.

''You have the power to make a request of the government that such an investigation as you suggest shall be made.''

''I do not care to exert it, captain.''

The grizzled veteran nodded. He motioned to one of his men who was in the room.

''Take Lightfoot away until I have opportunity to examine him alone,'' he ordered. To the others, he added: ''I cannot permit what he has done to pass entirely unnoticed.'' Then, when Lightfoot, without a protest, had been taken from the room, he addressed Wadleigh.

''Mr. Randall attacked you, in Buxton's store,'' he said. ''Sergeant Hurley, Mr. Buxton, and Mr. Taggart, saw him do so. Randall is not likely to deny the act. Sergeant Hurley has the power to press the charge against him, but it does not become his duty to do so, unless you require it. At the time of the attack, you made the statement that Randall had robbed you during the struggle. What are your wishes in regard to this matter, Mr. Wadleigh?''

Ace Wadleigh stepped forward quickly.

All the craft and subtlety of which he was master had returned to him. He had been silent so far, because he had paid little or no attention to what was said. He had been thinking, planning, plotting, scheming, all unmindful of what was going on around him. He was cool, complacent,

self-contained, and eminently resourceful, again. He had foreseen what was coming, and was prepared.

"Captain Badmington," he said, with a slow smile, "I will make no charge against Mr. Randall. I most earnestly request Sergeant Hurley not to do so. . . . Mr. Taggart feels the same way concerning a subsequent incident at the store, I am sure. I also wish to withdraw the statement I made concerning a package of papers which I lost at the time, and which, in the struggle, was hurled through the open door of the stove, into the fire, and destroyed. I can understand, now, that that incident was the result of accident. All in good time I will be able to establish the fact of my possession of those papers, of my ownership of them, and of their contents. Will you please take cognizance of what I say in that regard?"

"Yes," the officer replied.

"Also, publicly, I apologize to Mr. Randall for the assertion I made that he had robbed me. Likewise, I am now convinced that Randall's statements concerning the death of Gaffney are substantially correct. I ask, if you please, that the entire matter be dismissed—including that one, whatever it may be, against Lightfoot."

The old captain smiled behind his mustache and beard. He shot one quick and comprehensive glance at Buxton; and Buxton nodded, slightly.

"Dismissed," the captain said, shortly. "Lightfoot will, however, remain in custody until noon, to-morrow. That's all."

CHAPTER XV

Dan Randall's Error

Dan Randall returned with his friend Buxton to the store.

It was not the habit to lock doors in Magician. Buxton, when he went outside to seek Randall, had merely closed the door after him, nor had he waited to seek the pouch-belt of the dead Gaffney, which Dan had hurled to its hiding place behind the pasteboard boxes along the topmost shelf. He considered that to be as safely hidden where it was, as in another place.

Two customers had entered the store while he was absent, and had waited. Time was the least valuable of assets in that climate, after a storm like that one of the preceding night. Two or three acquaintances had dropped in, also, to keep warm, and to chat. Their presence would have precluded further intimate conference between Randall and Buxton, for the time being, even had Randall gone inside with his friend.

But, during the five minutes' walk between the barracks and the store, they had talked rapidly. Randall asked:

"Bux, when I tore that packet of deeds away from Ace, and chucked it toward you, or tried to, did I throw it into the fire?"

"Must have," was the laconic reply.

"Huh! Why didn't you yank 'em out again? Don't you think it could have been done in time to save them? Eh?"

"Oilskin burns rather freely, Dan. And that was a hot fire, if anybody should ask you about it."

"I know. Still—it does seem as if enough of the deeds might have been saved to prove what they were. However, I suppose it was all for the best. Anyhow, Ace Wadleigh and I are standing on even ground, now."

Buxton did not reply at once. Then he said:

"The odds, as they stand, are rather in your favor, don't you think, Dan?"

"How so? It looks to me like a stand-off."

"Well, the people from whom you secured the patents and deeds will give you new ones, won't they?"

"I don't know about that. I'm not sure of it, by any means, particularly since you told me about the big fellows being hot-foot after that very same right of way."

"You can bring them into court, can't you, and make them swear that they did grant you the patents, and sell you the property, and all that sort of thing?"

"I don't know. The same objection holds—provided that old Gregory and his agents have been after the same property. There is another circumstance to be considered, too."

"What one?"

"Didn't you hear what Ace said to the captain?"

"Sure I did."

"Well, across the mountain, in Janver, Ellery

Cuthbert and Orme Crosby are no doubt prepared to swear to any statements that Wadleigh and Taggart will make."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"This: What good will it do me to establish the fact that such deeds were given to me, if, on the other hand, Wadleigh, Taggart, Cuthbert, and Crosby all swear that I transferred the whole outfit, hook, line, bob, and sinker, to the company? They are four against one. The records are burned. Poor old Sam was burned up with them, and he was the only man who could have stood by me in that respect, in this emergency. And that isn't all, either."

"What else, Dan?"

"The 'what else' looks to me like pretty nearly the whole thing, Buxton."

"How so? What is it?"

"*It* happens to be a young woman by the name of Joyce Maitland," Randall replied, with slow emphasis.

They were within a dozen paces of the store steps. Buxton stopped in his tracks, compelling Randall to stop also.

"Do you mean to tell me, Dan, that Miss Maitland will uphold the things that those fellows will say, and do, and swear to? Are you such an infernal ass that you don't know that she cares more for your little finger than she does for——"

"That will be about all, Buxton," Dan interrupted, coolly. "I can't reckon with what I thought, or didn't think; not now. I've got to look facts in the face. I'll stare them out of countenance if it can be done. But, can it?"

"What do you mean by 'looking facts in the face?' Tell me that," Buxton demanded, hotly.

"Haven't I told them to you already?"

"Maybe you haven't told me all of them. If you have—well, you'd be several different kinds of a jackass to take for granted all that you have seemed to take."

"I didn't tell you quite all of it, Bux," Randall replied, with infinite sadness in his voice.

"Then tell me the rest of it—right now."

"I have already told you that I gave Wadleigh a thrashing with a leather quirt that hung in the office. I did not tell you that while I was holding him with one hand and thrashing him with the other one, Joyce Maitland came into the office. I did not tell you that she came up behind me, before I suspected that she was there, grabbed the quirt, yanked it out of my hand, and struck me with the butt-end of it, did I?"

"No. You didn't tell me that. It is hard to believe, too, Dan."

"It's true, every word of it."

"Go on. What else?"

"She knocked me senseless, that's all. When I came to—I don't know how long a time it was; two or three minutes, I suppose—she was still there, with the quirt in her right hand, butt foremost. She seemed rather startled by what she had done. I suppose she thought for a moment that she had killed me."

"Where was Wadleigh?"

"He had gone. He had remained in the room long enough to search my pockets, to abstract the packet of deeds, and to substitute a fake package

for it. I suppose he called to her to follow him when he ran away, but she was probably too slow in doing so to suit him. Oh, what's the use, Bux? All of that stock of mine stood in her name, and she gave Ace the power to vote it. That was enough, of itself. The rest of what happened was only a natural sequence to what had already been done."

Buxton shook his head slowly, then went on, in silence, toward the store steps.

But Randall caught him by the arm for yet another instance.

"Listen, Bux," he said, incisively. "There are just two things upon which I am entirely determined. Ace Wadleigh shall not win the right of way. That's one. Ace Wadleigh shall not have Joyce Maitland. That's two. And he shan't have *her,* not if I have to kill him to prevent it."

Dan turned about and strode away in the direction from whence they had come.

Buxton entered the store.

Randall had not gone far when he turned about and retraced his steps until he stood beside the still smouldering debris of the building wherein his cherished records had been destroyed; and with them the one friend in all that country who could have supplied the evidence to prove Dan's ownership.

Sad-eyed, but sternly, he gazed upon the partial wreck of his ambition, and so was quite unconscious of the silent approach of another, who came to a stop only a few paces distant.

Presently, however, he sensed the nearness of another person, and turned—to look upon the

mask-like, but coldly handsome face of Ace Wadleigh.

For a time which seemed longer than it really was the two men stared into each other's eyes. Just what the emotions of each might have been during that brief interval it is impossible to say. The fact was that neither of them expressed any emotion at all.

Wadleigh was the first to speak. He spoke slowly, coldly, almost without expression, and quite as if he were reading off the words instead of giving them original utterance.—With implacable resentment, he said:

"I saw you come here. I followed, because I had something to say to you. It is this: I have not forgotten, and I will not forget, the incident that happened in my office in Janver yesterday afternoon."

Dan had intended not to speak to Wadleigh; to ignore the man. But the reference to that scene in the office followed so closely upon what he had just been saying to Buxton that he could not refrain from replying.

"I don't think that either of us is likely to forget it," he replied; and he began to turn away, intending to leave Wadleigh where he was. But Wadleigh said:

"Wait a moment."

Dan waited, without speaking.

"For every lash of that whip I shall make you pay dearly, and with compounded interest, before I am through with you, Randall. No doubt you would have kept it up until you had killed me if you had not been interrupted as you were. But

the big end of the whip was heavier than the lash, and the arm that wielded it was almost——"

Randall made one quick step forward toward his tormentor. Wadleigh stopped his speech with the sentence he would have uttered incomplete. Had he been permitted to finish it, Randall would have known that it was Taggart who had struck him down—not Joyce Maitland. Ace Wadleigh did not know, then, that Joyce had returned to the office after her departure from the scene of the directors' meeting.

Wadleigh seemed to shrink backward, away from the glare in Dan Randall's eyes, although he did not move from his position. It was his spirit that shrank. Randall was dangerous at that moment, and Wadleigh knew it.

"If you so much as utter her name, I'll kill you now with my hands, Wadleigh," Dan said; and he meant every word of it. "She was there, with the quirt in her grasp, standing over me, when I opened my eyes. You had gone away. I never thought you were a coward until I knew that you had done that."

A great light burst upon Ace Wadleigh. His lips relaxed almost into a smile as he comprehended the meaning of Randall's words. He caught at the cue readily.

"I supposed that she would follow me," he said, and actually smiled. Unctious glee was in his heart and soul, then.

"She saw you rob me of the old deeds," Randall went on. "She saw you replace them with worthless papers, and she made no objection. You were foolhardy to dare to follow me here, and

face me, if you knew that I knew that. But I don't believe that you did know it."

"No. I did not know that." Wadleigh actually grinned as he said it.

The expression was maddening to Randall.

He covered the two or three remaining paces between him and his tormentor in one cat-like spring. His gloved hands were thrust forward to seize upon Wadleigh, when the latter, whose hands were in his side pockets, shot through the fur coat he was wearing, and Randall felt the sting of the bullet as it grazed the flesh of his thigh.

For the second time that day Dan Randall lost his temper.

CHAPTER XVI

Dan Randall's Ultimatum

What might have been a tragedy ended almost farcically.

The coat worn by Wadleigh had been handled somewhat roughly once before, that same day, in Buxton's store. The fastenings upon it were not secure. They broke entirely loose in Randall's grasp, and Wadleigh was literally twisted out of the garment by the strength of Dan's attack. He reeled backward, straight into the arms of Sergeant Hurley, who had discovered the two men together, and was rushing forward to prevent the very thing that had happened.

The coat remained in Randall's grasp, but he flung it from him toward the ruins of the burned building, and such was the force of his effort that the garment was sent whirling through the air, almost to the middle of the heaped-up debris; to the very center of the still smoking ruins.

Dan controlled himself with an effort.

The sight of Ace Wadleigh, coatless, and held tightly in the arms of the red-coated representative of the law, helped him to do that. Possibly a humorous twinkle in the eyes of the sergeant helped a little, too.

"Hurley," Dan said, "this quarrel was not of

my seeking. Wadleigh followed me to this spot and forced it upon me. If you arrest one of us you must take both. And if you do not take either of us, let me advise you to warn that man to keep away from me."

"I'll warn you both to keep away from one another," the sergeant replied. "If there is a repetition of this scene, or anything like it, I'll send you both down to Regina for trial. Leave us, Mr. Randall. Mr. Wadleigh, you'd better recover your coat if you care to save it. Who fired that pistol?"

"Nobody," Randall replied quickly. "You thought you heard one, Sergeant. Nobody was hurt."

"Oh. Very well. Go away, Randall—and be good."

Randall turned away toward Buxton's store. Wadleigh hastened to recover his coat of fur. Sergeant Hurley shrugged his shoulders, and went on about his business.

From inside the store nothing whatever had been observed of the incident. Buxton and the five men who were there were gathered about the stove, and Randall, feeling disinclined to joining in with their conversation, turned about when he had closed the door after him and looked out through the window in the upper half of it.

What he saw arrested his attention at once.

Wadleigh had gained the middle of the ruin, had recovered his coat and was in the act of thrusting his arms into the sleeves, when something that he saw among the ashes where it had fallen seemed to catch his attention and hold it.

Randall saw him bend forward with an eager gesture when the coat was only half way on, saw him retain that attitude for a time, then glance hastily around him with quick turns of his head.

Apparently satisfied, Wadleigh wrapped his frogless coat around him and hurried away from the ruin without so much as a backward glance toward it; but Dan, from the window, continued to gaze at the spot he had left, wondering what it could be that Wadleigh had seen that had so interested him.

"Buxton, come here a moment," he called out; and when Buxton paused beside him at the window, he added, in a low tone which the others could not hear: "I just had another little run-in with Ace. Never mind about the particulars. Do you see that spot over there among the ruins, pretty close to the middle, where the smoke is a trifle thicker and bluer than in other places?"

"Yes. What about it?" Buxton replied.

"I intended to throw Wadleigh about to that spot when I grabbed him a few minutes ago. Instead, I threw his coat there. He fell out of it, or got out of it, somehow. When I came away, he went after it. Bux, he found something there, besides the coat. And whatever it was that he found, he didn't take it away with him. Do you suppose it is possible that those records were not quite all burned up?"

Buxton shrugged his shoulders without replying. He stood silently beside Randall studying the ruins with knitted brows.

"The safe wasn't big enough to hold half of the record-books," he remarked, presently. "Those

that could not be stowed inside of it were arranged in racks along the wall, at either side of it. Remember, Dan?"

"Yes."

"I was trying to remember which books were kept in the racks, and which in the safe. I can't do it. Can you?"

"No; because I never knew."

"Well, big record books like those were do not burn very freely. They char; and the corners and edges of them turn to cinders, but—you know."

"Yes."

"It is barely possible——" He did not complete the sentence. After a moment he spoke again.

"You stay here and keep store a little while," he said. "I am going down the street to see the old captain. There ought to be a guard placed over those ruins."

Buxton seized his furs and hastened outside into the biting air again. Randall watched him go, meditatively. And then, just within his range of vision, twenty rods or more distant, Taggart and Wadleigh appeared from the direction of the barracks.

Dan saw Buxton meet them, and pause, facing them. He could see, although not distinctly, owing to the slanting vision that he had through the small window in the door, that they appeared to be talking rather heatedly. Then all three went rapidly toward the smouldering ruin of the Record Office building.

Dan, who still wore his furs, although he had loosened them when he entered the store, tight-

ened them around him again, and went outside.

He stopped on the steps, and, through the keen, frosty air, he could hear the voice of Burchard Buxton quite plainly. He was saying:

"I'm not saying that it isn't all right, Wadleigh. Perhaps it is. But if you and Taggart intend to do any searching among those ruins, without due authority, I am going to stand by, and see what you find, and what you carry away."

It was Taggart who wheeled upon Buxton and stopped him in the middle of the roadway.

"It's goin' to be mighty unhealthy f'r you, Burch Buxton, to butt into this here business," he said. "If you know what's good f'r you, you'll keep y'r hands off'n it. See? We ain't——"

He stopped.

Across the street, Randall was slowly approaching the group. Taggart and Wadleigh discovered him at the same instant. Buxton, perceiving that something was happening behind him, turned about also.

Dan approached quietly, and leisurely, and nobody spoke until he was quite near.

"Go ahead with your errand, Bux," Dan said, quietly. "I will see to it that nobody does any digging in those ruins, until you get back. Go on, Bux. There won't be any fuss here, unless these two thieves start one"; and he smiled into the faces of the two men.

Taggart took one quick step toward him, but Wadleigh seized the ex-lumberjack's arm and pulled him back, and for the space of half a minute the four men stared at each other in utter silence.

It was a tense interval, too.

What the outcome of it might have been if there had been no interruption cannot be guessed at. But Buxton, who had stepped up beside Randall, and was facing down the street more than the others, saw, approaching them, the very red-coated officer he had been seeking.

"Here comes Captain Badmington," he said, quickly. And knowing that there would be no further trouble he started away from the others to meet the captain.

"I'll take this opportunity to say something to both of you," Randall said, in a low tone, the moment Buxton had gone. "You'd best listen to me, too. You both know that I had all the papers necessary to give me that right of way across the pass. You both know that Ace Wadleigh stole them from me, and when and how he did it. You both know that the official records of them were burned in the fire that destroyed this building. I know, now, that Peter Gaffney had forged my name to documents which purported to transfer that right of way to you. I know that Gaffney's death was a deliberate murder. Some day, somehow, I shall find a way to prove it. We all know that I tore the stolen papers from Wadleigh (and perhaps the forged ones, also) during that tussle in the store, and that they flew into the stove and were burned. Well, so far as all that is concerned, we stand on even ground. I've got the right on my side, because I am the real owner of the property. It is mine, and I'm going to hold onto it. Neither you, nor old Lionel Gregory, nor anybody else, can get it away from me—unless I'm dead first.

Ace, you know something about what you're up against when you tackle me in this manner. Taggart does *not* know; he only guesses at it; but you can tell him all that he doesn't know. You'd better warn him. You can have, and you may keep until it rots, the Manitoba & Juneau railroad, and everything that goes with it. I will not raise a finger to get it back until I want it; and when I do want it, I'll buy it of you for a song. Now, I'm not going to threaten you, but I am going to tell you something. If you two, and your followers, male or female, get in my way, I'll break your hearts first, your pocketbooks next, and your necks afterward. And that will be about all for the present. If there is any digging done among those ruins, now, it will be done under the observation, and by the permission, of the Northwest Mounted Police."

Dan Randall turned abruptly and re-entered the store.

CHAPTER XVII

A Touch of the Tempest

Joyce Maitland never doubted that she would be able to intercept Dan Randall at the entrance to Magician pass.

If her judgment was at fault in that respect, it was because she figured his possible speed over the crust, on snowshoes, by what she might have done herself under like circumstances, and she did not take into proper consideration his greater strength and powers of endurance; also, she had heard and seen enough at the home of Yvonne to convince her that there was a rendezvous arranged somewhere, between Dan and Jules, and that Dan would be delayed because of it; and, lastly, because of the speed she made in running the locomotive from Janver to Bluerock, thus so greatly shortening the distance she had to travel, as compared with what she knew Dan would be obliged to cover, she harbored no doubt of her ability to intercept him.

That she did not succeed we already know.

As a matter of fact, although she was not aware of it, she arrived at the entrance to the defile very shortly after Dan and Jules had passed that way with the dogs and the strong but light sled with its burden of shovels, blankets, and other necessaries

for sustaining life, in the event of an emergency.

When the first frenzy of that terrific storm swept down from the mountains—that first outpouring of the full savagery of the elements which drove Dan and his companion into the niche for shelter—Joyce was less than an eighth of a mile behind them. Had she but known it, or had they, how differently might all things concerning this history have been told.

Had Joyce travelled so much as ten rods farther than she did, before the storm burst upon her, she must have come upon their tracks where they bowed in from the direction of White Lake; but which became entirely obliterated within a moment after that first blast of wind and snow.

It was better that she did not find the trail, for had she done so, she must have struggled onward in the hope of overtaking them; and so she would have perished.

As it was, that wild tempest befriended Joyce Maitland. While seeming to threaten her, it spared her. Although utterly terrifying in its sudden onslaught, it really was her savior.

The fury of it was appalling. In the grasp of it she was as helpless as a chip of wood in midstream, sweeping onward toward the rapids. She had no strength to contend against it, or even to withstand it; and not being weather-wise, it is not strange that it found her entirely unprepared. Even Jules Legarde had not anticipated the force and fury of it, as we know.

Joyce was swept off her feet in a twinkling.

The mysterious, but awful power of the wind seized upon her as if with giant hands, and yet, as

it proved, with gentle touch, and rolled her over and over before it, through the blinding snow, and the intense darkness that had fallen with it.

The storm came from the direction of the Badger range, across the valley where stood the thriving town of Janver. It lifted itself over the top of the Ridge where Joyce had discovered Dan from the window of her room, putting on his snowshoes. It dipped from there across the Little Lantowa river bottom, and whirled into the mouth of Magician pass, much as a volume of water will pour into a funnel which has been made ready to receive it.

Thus, Joyce was borne up the defile, instead of being swept out of it. Thus, had there been no obstruction in the way, she might have been carried to the very spot where Dan and Jules had sought temporary shelter.

But the god of the winds, with fingers that fashioned things mightily, and well, rolled her over the snow like a stray straw, until, with an eccentric twist of the tempest, she was lifted around the protecting end of a huge boulder, and tucked away beneath the overhanging lee side of it, as snugly, and as entirely out of the wind, as if she had been thrown into a cavern under the mountain.

Joyce was breathless. She was frightened; and, because she was frightened, half stunned, and only semi-conscious for a time.

For a space that cannot be reckoned by minutes or seconds because they might have been few or many, she made no attempt to move. She laid perfectly still where the giant hands of the wind had put her; and those same unseen hands, as if to

take advantage of the opportunity, packed particle after particle of the driving snow round about her resting place, until she was walled in as safely and securely, and as cozily, as it is possible to imagine.

By the time that Joyce had recovered her thinking powers sufficiently to have acted, and to have made use of her muscles, she also became wise enough to know that it was infinitely better that she should remain quite still, just where she was, sheltered from the fury of the storm, and with the protecting blanket of wind-packed snow tucked snug and warm around her.

She could hear, faintly, through the friendly barrier that shielded her, the roar of the storm as it swept on up the canyon. She knew that out there the cold was intense, that certain death stalked boldly abroad, or lurked in waiting for the unwary—and she knew also that she was temporarily safe within the shelter into which the wind had tossed her, and that the heat of her own body within the tempest-made thermo envelope of snow eliminated all danger of freezing for the time being. Later, there would be the task of escaping from the perils that threatened, of which the present and clamorous pangs of hunger were not the least to be considered.

Joyce Maitland was strong and able. In the East she would have been called a girl-athlete. She was the personification of health and energy. She was accustomed, and therefore inured, to the cold. She was thoroughly and warmly clad from the top of her prettily fur-hooded head to her fur-clothed legs and feet, and her young and splendid

body, glowing with youth, and hope, and strength, and promise, gave off heat enough of its own, inside the furs and snow, to protect her, so long as she could remain within that secure retreat.

She was thoroughly familiar with the character of those sudden mountain storms that are like summer squalls of rain and wind in their spasmodic fury, but which rarely last for long. She knew that this was one of them, and that it would probably pass away with the coming of another day.

There was snow within reach of her hand if she became thirsty, and she would not seriously require food for many hours to come.

Thus, lying there under the shelter of the rock, she reasoned it all out, conscious of the fact that she was quite sufficiently warm and would keep so; and she knew, too, that somewhere within her bower of snow there was a slight opening through which the air was filtering to her, so that she was in no danger of suffocation.

Oddly enough, one of her greatest comforts throughout her extremity was the belief that the violence of the storm would have driven Dan Randall and his companion to seek shelter, and that they could not be very far away from her own secure haven.

Then, drowsiness stole over her, and realizing that it was not of the dangerous kind that precedes freezing, she gave way to it, and slept.

The wild storm of that tempestuous night affected still another one of the persons who (all unthinkingly to herself) was to play a great part in the successful outcome of the Janver Cut-off.

Yvonne.

She was a child of the snows. She had been born in midwinter, on the shore of Lake La Martre, which is midway between the Great Slave and the Great Bear lakes, where the cold was intense, and where there was probably not another human being than her own father and mother within hundreds of miles when she came into the world; and winter after winter, afterward, until she was almost a young woman, Yvonne had gone northward with her parents in the provision-laden canoe, to return with them in the spring time when they brought the annual crop of furs to the post.

When Joyce left her, and sped toward the railway station and the roundhouse, bent upon the suddenly conceived errand, Yvonne merely shrugged her pretty shoulders and tilted her chin a trifle, and went about the rest of her preparations for the move she intended to make that very day.

Already she had spoken to her friend, Pitou Rondil, who would help her to get the things she had decided to take with her across the ridge and the valley beyond it, to the stone house at White Lake. Already she had got the articles from the room of m'sieu, at the house of the judge, and had taken them to Pitou. Very soon Pitou would be at the door with his homemade sledge and his tough and wiry little horse. For the crust was hard and firm along the way that they would go.

But, when Yvonne had packed the few articles which she intended to take with her from Ace Wadleigh's house—the few things that were literally her own, and Jules'—and had stepped outside the door to look for the approach of Pitou, she stood facing the great Badger range to the west of

Janver; and she saw what Jules, and Dan, and Joyce had failed to see; the sullenly angry and threatening bank of inky clouds that was rushing down upon them from the northwest.

Yvonne's first thought was one of regret, for experience told her that the projected removal of her things that day was impossible now. But, with a shrug of her shoulders and a shake of her pretty head she dismissed it, and returned inside.

Her second thought was one of concern. She wondered at what part of the pass the m'sieu and Jules would be when the coming storm should strike; and she shrugged again, with infinite faith in those two, no matter what the storm might threaten.

But she went to the door again, after a time, to look at the clouds, and she saw how they had spread themselves out over the valley; she felt the ominous pressure of their nearer approach.

Pitou arrived with the first blast of the tempest. With him, also, it was a foregone conclusion that there would be no journey to White Lake that evening. He decided that he would not even attempt to return to his own cabin, at the opposite side of the town, while the storm raged, and so he housed his sturdy little horse and sled in the lean-to behind the house, and went inside.

"Ver' bad, dat wind," he said, apologetically, much as if it were his own fault.

Yvonne nodded. She was disappointed, but she was practical. She understood how impossible it was that they should proceed with their plans.

"Eet ees ver' much mauvais temps, petite," he added, presently. "Ver' bad for la ma'm'selle,

no?'' Pitou was bending near the fire, rubbing his hands together.

Yvonne, who had crossed the room to one of the windows, turned about, suddenly.

''What is that? What did you say, Pitou?'' she demanded rapidly, in French.

''Ma'm'selle, Joie; she take la voiture à vapeur from ze roundhouse, and run away avec il. Oui; vraiment. Just now. One leetle while ago. Eet ees ver' colt outside, petite. She freeze-up, mabby. Je suis tres triste. Non? And thou, also, petite? You sorry, too, mabby?''

''But, I do not understand,'' said Yvonne, still speaking in French, refusing to mix her words. ''What did mademoiselle Joie do? Tell me the truth.''

''Je ne sais quoi, for true. She tak ze engine. She run away avec it. Not go ver' far. No. Eet ees not possible. Bluerock, mabby. Mais, for why?'' Pitou shrugged his wide shoulders in a gesture of dismissal.

''Listen to me a moment,'' Yvonne exclaimed, under her breath, still speaking in good French, for she wished Pitou thoroughly to understand all that she said. ''Is it true that mademoiselle Maitland took the locomotive from the house where they keep them, and ran away with it, toward the mountain? And that she went alone?''

''Oui, petite; eet ees true,'' Pitou replied. ''They go after her, maintenant. They get up steam een another one. But, dat tak' mooch time; non? Tom Rodman, heem gone half cassé, already,'' and Pitou touched his forehead signifi-

cantly to indicate Rodman's condition of half-crazed anxiety.

Yvonne clasped her hands together before her, and stood so for a moment, in deep thought.

It was all clear to her upon the instant why Joyce had stolen the engine, and why she had gone with it down the track toward Bluerock and the pass over the mountain, to Magician.

It was because m'sieu had gone that way.

Yvonne would have done the same thing herself, under like circumstances. She understood. She comprehended. Her intuition had already told her that there had been a quarrel of some sort between Joyce and Dan. "Perhaps, after all, ma'm'selle Joie loves him," she was thinking, while she recalled, not without regret, that she had been angry with madamoiselle that day, and had treated her badly. Yvonne was sorry for it, then.

It was strange how suddenly Joyce Maitland rose again to favor in the heart and mind of the little French woman with this information that old Pitou had brought to her out of the storm; nor was she one whit unmindful of the peril that Joyce must be encountering at that very moment, and of the new dangers she would have to encounter with every added instant of time.

The heart of Yvonne throbbed madly, then. Ma'm'selle had done exactly what she, herself, might have attempted under like circumstances. Suddenly she understood—and activity returned to her. She sprang toward old Pitou, seized his arms, thoroughly startling the old man by her vehemence.

"She must be saved!" she cried out. "Ah, the

m'sieu would die, if la Joie should freeze to death out there. He would nevair forgive Yvonne. Non. Nevair. She must be saved, Pitou. You hear me? She must be saved. I, Yvonne must save her, and you, Pitou, must help me."

CHAPTER XVIII

The Tracks in the Snow

With trembling haste Yvonne began to don the outer clothing which she knew that she would need to face the storm that was now raging outside. Her pretty face was drawn into hard lines of determination, her eyes were wide and serious, and her whole demeanor was that of one who is about to assume a task that is already hopeless, but which, nevertheless, shall be performed.

Old Pitou watched her out of his small, beady eyes. Twice, while she was thus employed, he shook his grizzled head, slowly. At last, when she was nearly ready, he put himself between her and the door, and stood there with folded arms until she looked toward him and discovered his attitude.

She understood it, too. She knew, herself, that she should not venture into the storm, and she saw instantly that Pitou intended to prevent her from doing so; by force, if necessary.

"I must go," she told him, as if he had already put his objection into words; but he shook his head.

"Non, non, Yvonne," he said, in reply. "Eet ees la mort. La tempete ees ver' bad. You freeze, too, mabby. For why you go, petite? You theenk

you sav' La Joie? But, non. Eet ees not possible. You will stay here, avec moi, petite."

There was such quiet determination in the attitude of the old man that Yvonne knew that he would not permit her to pass. Moreover, she knew that he was right in refusing to do so. Nevertheless, she sought to argue with him. Pitou only shook his old head the more firmly when she had finished with a torrent of words in which she sought to convince him that it was her duty to make the attempt to save Joyce Maitland, and that m'sieu would never forgive her if she sat quietly inactive while the girl he loved was freezing to death out there, in the storm.

Pitou kept his place between Yvonne and the door.

"For why you go?" he demanded again. "Parceque you theenk to save her from the tempete, and the cold. Eet ees too late for dat. Eef she freeze, she already freeze—now. Non? For true eet ees so. Bimeby, mabby, when the wind have stopped, you can go. Je alle avec toi, then. I go, too. Mais, maintenant? Sacrrrrre! Déjà, eef la ma'm'selle freeze, she ees dead by now. But, mabby she fin' somme place cacher; somme leetle place to hide herself unteel the tempete ees gone."

Yvonne did not reply to him. She remained as she was, facing Pitou, as yet undecided whether to attempt to force her way past him, or not. He went on again with his arguments.

"Eef petite will theenk about eet, un leetle moment, just for the sak' of old Pitou. La ma'm'selle, she tak' la voiture à vapeur, ze engine, an' run away with eet. Already, maintenant, long

while ago, she get to Bluerock, mabby, an' start for the pass. Tres bien. Mabby she fin' the m'sieu et Jules; mabby they fin' her. But, thou? Een thees storm, you fin' theem? *Non!*"

Yvonne began slowly to lay aside her wraps.

She had been convinced even before she made the attempt to start out into the storm that it would be useless, and she knew how utterly impossible it would be for her to find any trace of Joyce, even if she were there, at the entrance to the pass. Every track that the girl might have made would now be obliterated—and, if Joyce had succeeded in finding some sort of shelter from the fury of the wind, as Pitou suggested, and had enough judgment to pack the snow around her, she need not freeze, clad as Yvonne knew her to be, and with the health and endurance that Yvonne knew her to possess.

So she seated herself in a chair near the window and listened to the roar of the gale as it shrieked past the house; and Pitou, perceiving that Yvonne had abandoned all thought of going, for the time being, filled his short pipe, lighted it, drew a chair close to the fire, and smoked and drowsed, and presently dreamed about other tempests of like character through which he had passed when there had been next to no shelter at hand to protect him.

After a time, Yvonne left him there, asleep near the fire, and went to her own room, where she tossed and turned in uneasy sleep until a sudden cessation of the tempest's violence roused her.

The storm ended as it had begun. It had blown out its fury, and dawn was at hand.

Yvonne peered into the kitchen and discovered

that Pitou had disappeared. She did not doubt that he had been gone a long time, and she knew that he would return, presently, with such news as might be obtained at the railway station.

While she was preparing breakfast she went frequently to the door and looked for him, for she was impatient now to be gone. At least she could search for ma'm'selle Joie, whom m'sieu loved, and she prayed silently, but with all her heart and soul in her prayers, that Joyce might have been spared.

The news that Pitou brought to her, presently, was meager indeed.

Tom Rodman had made the run to Bluerock and return. The engine that Joyce had taken without permission was there. That was all. It had been impossible for them to continue the search. They had barely been able to get back to Janver. But they were now getting out the plows. They would fight their way to Bluerock; and after that—after that they would do the very best that could be done.

Yvonne's was a prophetic soul.

While she put the steaming coffee and the hot breakfast before Pitou her heart became suddenly light, as if she could even then peer intuitively into that safe space under the rock which the snow and wind had transformed into a secure *cachette* for Joyce Maitland.

Her abounding faith in m'sieu, which was in all things infinite, gave her faith, also, in the things that were his, and in the hopes and wishes that he held dear. Her own adoration for Dan had made her quick to know of the boundless love he felt for

Joyce, and she did not believe for a moment that le bon Dieu would permit the beautiful American girl to perish in the storm that had raged throughout the night, but which was now past and gone, as if it had never been.

But the storm had rendered it impossible for Pitou's little horse to draw the laden sledge to White Lake that day. Both knew that there would be places beyond the backbone of the Ridge where the drifts would be deep indeed, and soft, and impassable for all of the heavier creatures save man himself, supported by snowshoes.

However, Yvonne took the time, before starting, to pack the things upon the sled, that it might be in readiness against her return.

Then, within an hour after daylight, they set out.

Pitou accompanied Yvonne wholly as a matter of duty and affection. The purpose of their errand he considered entirely hopeless. Personally, he would have shrugged his shoulders, and waited, until the thaws came, before searching for the frozen body of Joyce Maitland. Then they would be able to find it quickly; now it seemed to him like a useless as well as a hopeless task.

Even he, experienced as he was, had not realized the full violence of the storm, and had not correctly estimated the difficulties they would encounter in making the short cut across the ridge to White Lake.

Pitou did not consider it far. An hour, two hours, perhaps, he thought entirely sufficient for the trip. Yvonne agreed with him in that. Nevertheless, at the end of two hours they had not accomplished

half the distance, and it was very nearly five hours after they came away from the house in Janver before they arrived at the entrance to Magician pass.

There Pitou came to a stubborn halt.

"Que voulez vous, Yvonne?" he exclaimed, querulously, and the old man was rarely that, particularly with the wife of Jules. "Eet ees almos' nuit. Ma'm'selle is freeze a la mort, vraisemblablement; pourquoi non? Maintenant it will be dark before we can get to the stone maison, at lac la Blanc. Venez. We go back."

Yvonne did not even pause to reply. She hurried onward, and Pitou, perforce, followed after her, mumbling as he went, until, presently, he heard her cry out with an expression of mingled surprise and joy.

The old man hastened to her side. She was pointing downward at the snow, but the quick eyes of Pitou had already discovered tracks there; tracks that had been made since the storm of last night; tracks which might have been made only a very little while before Yvonne discovered them.

Pitou bent down over the trail that had been left. To his practical sight there was as much individuality about the track left by a snowshoe as that of the trotting fox or the triangular imprint of a hare.

This one he recognized the instant he examined it. More than once he had traveled through the snows beside those same snowshoes. Old Pitou and Tom Rodman, the engineer, were great friends.

"Eet ees m'sieu Rodman who have gone by

here, petite," he said, straightening himself again. "I know de track of the soulier gauche. I mended dat shoe, moi-meme."

"'And did he come down out of the sky, then, to make the trail here, where it is?" Yvonne demanded, in French, and with fine scorn of Pitou's woodcraft in her voice and attitude. "See. The trail does not start at the entrance to the pass. But, there. Do you see? Beneath the rock."

She fairly flew across the space between her and the boulder beneath which Joyce had found shelter. A mere glance into the recess out of which Joyce had dug her way finally convinced both of them who it was that had rested there.

The trail of Tom Rodman's snowshoes, which Joyce had taken from the cab of the engine, led directly up the pass toward the summit.

With a little exclamation of delight at the discovery they had made, Yvonne turned, and would have followed it, had not the strong arms of Pitou seized upon and held her tightly.

"Non, non, petite," he said, with finality in his tone. "Eet ees night. Soon eet weel be ver' dark. Alors, you can't see the trail to follow eet. Eet ees ver' colt oop dere, even now. Bimeby eet be more colt. An' la ma'm'selle, she start long ago, mabby. Bientôt, she get to Devil's Pulpit. She rest, there. She mak' fire, mabby. There is food there, aussi. She cook eet. We cannot go on, now. Il n'y faut plus penser, petite."

The great burden of it all was that Yvonne knew that Pitou spoke only the literal truth. Very soon it would be black darkness in the canyon of the

pass; much too dark for any hope that a trail could be followed, although it was true that the tracks could lead only in one direction.

Yet, Yvonne's loyalty to her beloved m'sieu resented bitterly the thought of turning back now.

The trail had been found. It had been made by Miss Maitland. Somewhere, up there in the pass ahead of them, Joyce should be found. Suppose something had happened to ma'm'selle, and she could not make Devil's Pulpit in time?

With sudden decision Yvonne wrenched herself free from the clinging grasp of old Pitou and darted away from him, up the pass; but in her haste she tripped one of her snowshoes beneath the toe of the other one, and fell; and the old man, smiling in grim humor, seized upon her, lifted her in his arms, and bore her away in the direction of White Lake, despite her struggles.

Nor did he put her down again until they were a long distance beyond the entrance to the pass, and darkness had really fallen upon them. He knew, then, that she could not return alone, and he set her gently down upon her feet beside him.

But Yvonne was angry, and would not respond to his apologies, and so, presently, he started on, and she followed, and after a time they came safely to the door of the stone cottage where Dan Randall had determined to make his home.

Both halted abruptly, then, and both were amazed by what they saw.

From a side window which had been invisible as they approached the house a light streamed out upon the snow; and it shone upon tracks that

passed beneath that window, showing that somebody had lately passed that way.

Pitou grasped Yvonne's arm, as a signal for silence. With cat-like tread he passed on to the tracks under the window, and examined them. Then he straightened up with a glad cry, and called out lustily:

"Jules! Jules!"

The doorway was flung open on the instant. Jules stood beyond the threshold. A warm fire glowed within the house. Amazed pleasure was in Jules' eyes when he saw who it was that had demanded admittance.

Yvonne rushed forward, not into his arms, as he had expected, but past him, into the room, searching eagerly around it, everywhere, for another person. Then she turned to face her husband.

"Where is ma'm'selle Joie?" she demanded. "She is here? N'est ce pas?"

"Ici? Non. Pourquoi?" Jules replied, spreading out his hands and hunching his broad shoulders. "La ma'm'selle ees een Janvers; non? For why you ask me dat, Yvonne?"

Yvonne explained. She told of everything that had happened since Jules' departure, omitting nothing, and ended with a description of the trail that had led up the canyon, which Pitou would not permit her to follow.

At the end of it, Jules shrugged his shoulders again, outwardly undisturbed by all that he had heard. But he reached for his outdoor garments, and his snowshoes, notwithstanding.

"I comme across from the pass to White Lac by short cut, an' so not see ma'm'selle on the trail.

Mabby she get to lutrin du diable before la nuit. Bientôt, I fin' her, mabby. I go back there, maintenant. Toi stay here, Yvonne. Et toi, Pitou, aussi,'' he said, with simple directness, and went out into the night again, alone.

CHAPTER XIX

Some Freaks of Fortune

Jules Legarde had crossed the Lantowa mountains by Magician pass twice within twenty-four hours, yet he started forth again to cover once more a third of the distance and return without a regret for the great fatigue he must have felt. All of his energies and resources were fixed upon the one thought that the young woman, whom he knew his master loved, was in danger, and that he must rescue her.

Old Pitou would have accompanied him, and, indeed, did follow him outside the door. But Jules ordered the elder man to stay where he was.

"I not know when I comme back, Pitou," he said, "but you, eef you wanta help, go back to Janver as soon as eet ees le jour, an' to the office of le chemin de fer, on the square. You weel fin' behin' la porte, een the leetle office, un sachet, so big"; and he demonstrated the dimensions of the satchel with his hands. "You breeng dat sachet ici, to Yvonne, tres bientôt, an' you tell her, céler il—to hide eet ver' queeck."

Then he went swiftly away into the night.

The stone house under the mountain near White Lake was well provisioned. Jules had already provided for himself, and eaten, when his wife and old

Pitou arrived. Yvonne very quickly prepared a second hearty meal.

She had overheard the directions that Jules gave to Pitou, and she added her own to them when the old man returned indoors. They were merely that he should procure assistance from among some of his own people in Janver, if that should be necessary, and bring the laden sled with him when he came back to the lake.

It was characteristic of her that she did not permit herself to worry over the possible fate of Joyce Maitland, who was in the hands of God, and who would be spared or would perish, according to His will. She knew that Jules would do everything that was possible to be done.

Meanwhile, across the mountains, in Magician, other things were happening.

For one thing, there had been no thought in the minds of Captain Badmington or Sergeant Hurley that the "breed" would have any idea of attempting to evade the temporary confinement to which the captain had sentenced him. That the Indian, who had a quarter-strain of French blood in his veins, would seek to escape, was not even thought of. Nor would Lightfoot himself have thought of such a thing but for Ben Taggart.

But Taggart had made a disquieting discovery since the occurrences of the scene at Buxton's store.

Wadleigh, before their departure from Janver, had given him the forged deeds and other papers and documents that went with them, to carry. They had been wrapped in protecting oilskin, also, and Taggart believed that he had deposited them

safely inside of the sheepskin jacket that he wore under his furs.

The packet had disappeared—or he had left it behind him; and Taggart could not remember, positively, that he had brought it with him.

If he had left the packet behind him, he knew exactly where it was, for he distinctly recalled having put it down upon a chair beside him, in his shack near the railroad—and he did not remember, to a certainty, that he had picked the packet up again and stowed it away in his jacket.

It was not to be thought of that he should return across the pass. Wadleigh needed him in Magician. Every circumstance connected with their schemes demanded his continued presence there. But the forged deeds were extremely important, just then; they were vital, in view of the destruction of the official records, and the death of Sutherland, the only man who could have made any sworn statement concerning the rightful ownership of the right-of-way. There was, now, no official who could deny the authenticity of the forged documents.

Already Taggart had determined as soon as the hearing before the captain was over to send Lightfoot back across the mountain to get them; and so, when the Indian was led from the room to be imprisoned, although it was only for a few hours, Taggart was much more concerned about the circumstance than was Lightfoot himself, and he followed after the Indian as soon as it was possible for him to do so.

No key had been turned upon the prisoner. The surrounding hills, the deep snow, and, more than

all else, the direct orders of the captain of the N. W. M. P., were considered as bars quite sufficient to hold him. Lightfoot was merely thrust into a small room by himself and told to remain there until he was wanted. After that, he was left to his own devices.

So Taggart had no difficulty in going to him.

What the directions were that Taggart gave to him need not be told here, for we already know that the packet which Taggart had lost was safely reposing in one of the pockets of Sergeant Hurley's uniform. The fact that Hurley had temporarily forgotten its existence does not now concern us.

But the consequence of those orders was, that very soon after Taggart paid his hasty visit to the Indian, and talked with him in his own dialect, Lightfoot glided from the room, and by skulking along devious ways and resorting to crafty methods which only an Indian could have employed successfully that day, managed to gain the outskirts of the town, unseen, and then, by keeping the drifts and the foothills between him and the houses and streets of Magician, to remain so, until he was hidden from view beyond the eastern entrance to the pass.

It was nothing to Taggart that Lightfoot, by his act, had defied the power of the North West Mounted Police, and would have to pay dearly for it; that, instead of one day, or part of one, in nominal confinement, he would probably be imprisoned for months. And the promise of money, and white whiskey, overcame any scruples that Lightfoot might have had.

The Indian came upon the trail of Jules Legarde at the beginning of the pass, and recognized it as perfectly as he would have known Jules' features; and he followed not too fast, thereafter, for he had no wish to overtake the man ahead of him.

There was no friendship between Jules and Lightfoot. The former felt nothing but contempt for the latter. Lightfoot envied, and therefore hated, Jules. Once, almost a year ago, Jules had put the fear of death into Lightfoot's heart for having dared to raise his eyes toward Yvonne, in an expression which Jules had not liked; and so Lightfoot hung back upon the trail, governing his own speed by that which he believed Jules to be making. He thought, too, that Jules would be likely to turn aside toward White Lake at a point midway between Devil's Pulpit and the foot of the pass on the west side of the mountain, for every one of the by-paths and devious ways among those hills was as well known to Lightfoot as to Jules.

It was Lightfoot's plan to hurry onward by the very shortest way into Janver, as soon as Jules should turn aside from the main trail across the mountain. Thus, he would avoid the man ahead of him; and he would go at once to the offices of the railroad company, on the square, and get possession of the small black satchel that m'sieu Randall had described to Captain Badmington at the hearing. After that he would go after the small packet which m'sieu Taggart had forgotten.

Such were his orders, in part. There was also another one, which concerned a certain young woman who was supposed to be still in Janver.

But that was to come afterward—after Lightfoot had stolen the small black satchel, and had recovered the packet of papers wrapped in oil-skin.

The Indian felt the importance of the confidence that had been reposed in him by Taggart, and he looked forward, also, to the unholy joy he would find in the white whiskey he was to receive, and the money that was coming to him if he succeeded, which meant more white whiskey, and many more unholy joys.

When he descended from the summit house toward Devil's Pulpit, he held back, believing that Jules might stop there, to rest and feed. But Jules had not done so.

Half way between the pulpit and the bottom of the pass, Lightfoot came to the place where Jules had turned off through a narrow gulch that drifted from the south side of the canyon. It was the shorter cut to which Jules referred in his talk with Yvonne and Pitou at the stone house.

Night and darkness were not much more than an hour away when Lightfoot arrived at that point, and he speeded up a bit. He had spied upon Jules enough, in the past, to know of the rendezvous near the lake, and he thought that surely the Frenchman would stop there to rest, and eat, and so would enable him to get to Janver first. Then, half a mile farther down the pass, just around an oblique bend in the canyon, the Indian came to a sudden halt.

In front of him, not fifty yards from where he stopped, and stretched at full length upon the snow, asleep, or senseless, or dead, was the furred

figure of a woman whom he instantly recognized.

That first glance at her satisfied him that she had been entirely alone. No trail but her own led up to that spot where she had fallen. The Indian hurried forward, and bent over the unconscious form of Joyce Maitland.

He discovered at once that she was alive, and that the intense cold had not yet begun to bite at her nose and cheeks and lips, which were the only parts of her person exposed to it. His training told him that she had only just fallen, unconscious, when he found her; that she could not have been there more than a very few moments.

And that was true.

Had Joyce been able to keep up the struggle a few minutes longer than she had done, she would have rounded the bend in the canyon and come in sight of the pulpit, and so would have been conscious, and unafraid, and quite able to protect herself, when she would have met Lightfoot. Or, had Jules gone on down the canyon instead of turning aside through the short cut toward White Lake, he would have met her at about the moment when she had dug her way out from beneath the boulder that had sheltered her so snugly through the preceding night, for it had been late in the day when Joyce awoke and dug her way out from under the rock into the open air.

She was thoroughly familiar with the geography of the pass. She knew the time, too, by the slant of the sunlight among the crags along the defile, and she realized that the hour was much too late for her to hope to return to Janver before nightfall, even had she possessed the necessary

strength and endurance. Moreover, she had been almost twenty-four hours without food, and she had undergone so much that her vitality was sapped to the point of exhaustion.

She knew that the pulpit, half way up the pass to the summit, was the nearest refuge. She knew that there was wood there with which to build herself a fire, and that food and coffee were always cached beneath that safe retreat. That was why she did not turn back—to have met Yvonne and Pitou.

So she left her shelter under the rock too soon for them to find her, too late to encounter Jules, and just in time to fall, from faintness and exhaustion, in the path of the approaching Lightfoot, and less than five minutes before he appeared.

The fates played strange pranks with her fortunes that day and the one preceding it; and during many that were to follow it.

The Indian, Lightfoot, first looked to see that her nose and cheeks were not beginning to freeze. Satisfied of that much, he covered them securely from further immediate danger in that respect. Then he lifted her in his arms, for he was as powerful, almost, as Jules Legarde.

For an instant, after that, he faced toward the pulpit, which he also knew to be the nearest shelter. But he shook his head and turned away from it again.

She was lost. Somebody would seek her. The pulpit would be the first place where she would be sought.

The third part of the instructions that Taggart had given him concerning the things he was to do,

and which seemed to him the most important, was here, at hand; had met him half way.

So Lightfoot turned his back upon the pulpit, and, with Joyce Maitland in his arms, smiled craftily at the thought of what he determined, then, to do.

CHAPTER XX

The Great Change

The "great change" came some time during the night that followed.

It is spoken of by different names in various sections of the great Northwest, between the forty-fifth and the sixtieth parallels: The "great change," the "Chinook," or the "big thaw." Weather-wise persons in Magician and Janver had "smelt" it, even before the last storm. Buxton had prophesied it to Randall soon after his arrival from across the pass.

In effect, the "great change" might be likened to the throwing open of furnace doors to scatter abroad the heat that has been confined; to meet and overcome the cold that has for many months locked up everything with snow and ice.

The "great change" is wonderful. The snow and ice melt, and shrink, and disappear before it. Canyons, gulches, ravines, gullies, hitherto impassable, and bound up in flint-like ice are transformed into torrents of rushing waters. Huge rocks, immense boulders, uprooted trees, barriers of silt and clay, are picked up like straws and moved from their former positions, mowed down, and washed away. Great trees are undermined, and felled. Nature does its annual houseclean-

ing. Old trails are closed and barred; new ones are opened. Topography alters its details, although it rarely changes its character.

During a week after that night, Magician pass was not a pass at all, through which anything alive could travel. Whole sections of the M. & J. R. R., between Bluerock and Nelson, and again between Nelson and Magician, were torn away by the floods of water that poured down upon them from the mountain sides. Between Janver and Carrolton, it was the same.

Everywhere, telegraph poles were prone upon the ground, wires were down, and useless, traffic was entirely paralyzed, business was dead, nothing was doing.

Everybody waited.

But then, everybody was accustomed to waiting during the first days of the "great change," while Nature was housecleaning. There was always such opportunities to do things, after it, that every one could afford to wait, with complacency, and with certainty.

Over at Magician, Dan Randall waited, with what patience he could summon to his aid, passing his days with Buxton, planning for the campaign that was to begin so very soon; making ready for the greatest fight of his life; preparing to pit his all against Wadleigh, and Taggart, and the others —even against the great Lionel Gregory, himself.

Wadleigh and Taggart waited, also; but with manifest impatience. They kept their counsel, and they avoided Randall.

Some digging and delving and searching had

been done among the ruins of the record office; but it had been done by the police, and whatever had been found, if anything at all, the police had kept to themselves.

That night when the big thaw came—that same night when Jules Legarde toiled wearily back up the pass in search of Joyce Maitland hours after Lightfoot had discovered her and borne her away—that same night when old Pitou took Yvonne to the stone house at White Lake—Dan Randall climbed upon a step-ladder, as soon as Buxton had closed and locked his store door, and brought down from the topmost shelf the pouch-belt which Peter Gaffney had worn about his body when he died.

Dan had felt that something was inside of it when Jules passed it to him at Devil's Pulpit. Mild curiosity, nothing more than that, led him to a further examination of it. Already he had wondered at himself for having misled Captain Badmington in regard to it.

But the thing that he did find when he searched the belt, and when, at last, he comprehended the full significance of his discovery, left him staring; not so much at the roll of many sheets of thin parchment-paper that he held in his hand, as into the fire that burned, red hot, in the stove. Buxton, perched upon the counter opposite him, with his briar pipe tilted between his jaws, remarked, dryly:

"I had forgotten all about that thing, Dan, or I'd have taken a look at it myself, while you were outside. What have you found?"

Randall raised his head, slowly. Then he got

upon his feet and took a turn down the length of the store and back before he replied.

"I have found something that is rather wonderful, Bux," he said. "I don't think I can deny, after this, that there is a destiny that shapes our ends; mine, anyhow. There is the roll. Read it, when you care to do so. Not now, though. For the present I prefer not to think about it—save, only, of the main fact of what it means to me. Lock it up in your safe for me after you have read it. I am going outside for a little air."

"Is it about the railroad, or the cut-off, Dan?" Buxton asked, accepting the roll that Randall held out toward him.

"No. It concerns only me—and that dead man who was called Gaffney," Randall replied, and took his furs and went outside into the cold. The great thaw was yet some hours in the future.

Across the mountain, in Janver, Jules Legarde waited, also, and it was indeed a bitter time of waiting for him. Never before in all his life had the stolid patience within him, that was his greatest characteristic, been so tried.

Jules had not found Joyce Maitland that night when he had gone back to the pass in search of her, as we already know. He had gone back by the short cut—as he had come out of it. It was a much shorter route, and brought him into the pass about midway between the pulpit and the place where Yvonne and old Pitou told him that they had come upon the place that had sheltered her.

It had been much too dark in the canyon for him to attempt to follow a trail, but he never doubted

that Joyce would have been able to reach the pulpit, and that he would find her there. According to Yvonne, there had been ample time for the ma'm'selle to do that before darkness fell.

He traveled so rapidly and the darkness was so intense that he had neither time nor opportunity to find the snowshoe trail that Lightfoot had left so plainly marked upon the snow in his descent of the canyon.

But at the pulpit, when he found that Joyce had not been there, he made himself some torches —several of them—and started out again, believing then that he would find her somewhere in the snow, frozen. Thus, almost at once he came upon the trail of Lightfoot.

Jules was convinced, then, that Joyce had been saved. He recognized the imprint of the Indian's snowshoes, exactly as Lightfoot would have known his; and he did not like the Indian, nor did he understand why Taggart's servant had followed him so soon across the mountain pass. But even Lightfoot, bad as he doubtless was, could not do otherwise than give aid to Ma'm'selle Joie; and surely Lightfoot had found her.

Jules sped down the pass with all the speed he could muster to his aid.

He trailed the torch behind him, occasionally flaring it above his head to make sure of the trail, and to know where the two had met, and so came at last upon the spot where Joyce had fallen, and where the Indian had found her. He read each and all of the signs as plainly as if they had been set down in type before an educated man; and what

he saw, and read, amazed him at first, then startled him, then angered him into sudden fury. He could have killed Lightfoot at that moment.

"By gar!" he said, aloud. "Dat homme, Lightfoot, heem fin' ma'm'selle here, after she have fall down. Alors, heem tak' off hees snowshoes, an' hers, aussi; an' heem put his own shoes ovair hees back, an' heem put hers on hees pieds, so dat he mak' de track like ma'm'selle's. By gar, heem think heem fool Jules? Non, non. All that, it mean mauvais beaucoup—ver' bad—I theenk, mabby-so. For why did Lightfoot go off dat way by de ledge? Not for ma'm'selle's good, heem do dat—No. Ver' well, I go, too. Je suis las; but, I go, too, jus' sam'."

The ledge to which he referred, and along which he knew that Lightfoot had borne Joyce in his arms, afforded, in the summer time, a short-cut pathway to the station at Bluerock, if one was afoot in the pass, and cared to take it. Just now, it was, or should have been, impassable.

Jules did not pursue that route very far. Before he came to the end of the ledge, he encountered a barrier of snow and ice which effectually stopped him, and in the darkness he could not determine whether it had fallen across the trail after Lightfoot had passed the spot with Joyce in his arms, or if it had crashed down upon them and buried them both beneath it.

But he did know that he could go no farther by that route, that night, or that next day, or perhaps for weeks to come, for his experience told him that the big thaw was at hand, and it would be utterly impossible to find Lightfoot's trail—

if, indeed, there should be one—after the dawn of another day.

It was with a heavy heart, indeed, that he abandoned all further effort to rescue Joyce Maitland. There was literally nothing that could be done. With a heavy sigh he turned back. La ma'm'selle was in the keeping of le bon Dieu, now; Jules could do no more. Perhaps the Indian had managed to save her; perhaps they had both been buried beneath the crashing ice and snow. There was nothing left to do but wait.

He was nearly spent when he started to fight his way back to the little house near White Lake, and he chose the route by way of the mouth of the pass, which was less difficult than by the shorter cut that he had used before.

Half an hour later, when he issued from the pass at the entrance, and turned toward the left, he stopped short, sniffing the air, much the same as dogs will do when the breeze bears a remembered scent to them.

"Le grand degél," he murmured. "Eet ees the chinook weend, for vrais. To-morrow, when the day come, I cannot go to Janver. Tres bien. I will go now."

Thus, instead of returning to White Lake, and Yvonne, he bravely turned toward Janver, and it was a weary Jules, indeed, who stumbled, when it was nearly daylight, into the dismantled kitchen of the house from whence he had started out, barely thirty-six hours before. Yvonne had taken everything that was rightfully her own, and Jules'. The place was almost bare.

But even then the faithful fellow did not rest. The time had not come for that.

He waited only long enough to make a fire and brew some strong tea, which he swallowed at a gulp. Then he set out for the square to get the little black satchel from the office of the railway company.

He admitted himself at the front door with the key that Randall had given to him. It was still dark, outside, although day was almost at hand. He wished to perform his errand and to return to the house to rest before the dawn should break.

Jules stepped inside, and turned about to close the door and fasten it after him, and as he did so, that sixth sense which is acquired by men who pass their lives in the open, warned him; but the warning came too late. He felt a human presence close to him. He half turned to meet it. And then the blow fell.

Jules Legarde had arrived too late. Somebody was there ahead of him.

And that somebody, whoever it was, had heard his approach, and had laid in wait behind the door, and had struck a murderous blow in the darkness.

The door opened and closed again, softly, after the blow fell. Somebody passed noiselessly outside; and Jules was stretched at full length, senseless, an inert mass upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXI

Things Begin to Move

Dan Randall waited at Magician for the torrents of water from the melted snow to sweep clean the mountainsides and make them ready for the campaign he intended to begin. He waited with expectancy, and determined resolve; waited, knowing nothing of the things that had happened, and were happening, at the other side of the mountains.

Ace Wadleigh and Ben Taggart waited at Magician, also, and for the same things to come to pass. They waited apparently in sullen silence, and plotted and schemed while they waited.

Jules waited, too, in Janver, for that blow in the dark did not disable him. Consciousness returned to him, and soon after it was light he dragged himself through the hallway and up the stairs, and finally into the deserted offices of the railway company, admitting himself with Randall's key.

The satchel was not there. Jules was not surprised that it was not. He had been thinking deeply while he made his way up the stairs. After a time, when he was somewhat rested, and had partially recovered from the immediate effects of the stunning blow that had fallen upon him, he went outside again, and returned, almost unnoticed, to Wadleigh's house.

He waited there; for it was as impossible for him to go back to the stone house at White Lake, now that the great thaw had come, as it was for Pitou to come to Janver for the laden sled, as Yvonne wished him to do.

Cuthbert, Crosby, one Masterson, and the remaining three directors of the railway company, passed most of their time of waiting at Thompson's hotel; and somewhere, if her life had been spared, perhaps Joyce Maitland waited, too. Everybody was waiting. Dame Nature, alone, was doing things.

Jules Legarde was the first to brave the dangers of Magician pass. He started out to make the trip on the morning of the sixth day after the thaw.

There were many more dangers to face than when he had gone over the pass with Randall. The great peril of intense cold was almost eliminated; a thousand new ones had succeeded it; but Jules faced them all, as he had done before, imperturbably. He stopped at the stone house at White Lake, on his way, and stayed there thirty minutes, or less. Night had fallen when he arrived at Magician, and announced his presence by a gentle tapping against the rear door of Buxton's store, out of which he had passed on his errand just one week earlier.

It was Dan who opened the door for him. Buxton had gone out, and Randall was alone.

"I have not been impatient, Jules," Dan said, as he admitted him. "I knew that you would get to me as soon as it could be done. I did not look for you before to-morrow or the next day. Well?"

"Eet ees mauvais news, m'sieu, dat I breeng. Ver' bad, m'sieu. Ver' bad theengs have happen. You will feel dat Jules have not done hees devoir," Jules replied, sadly, and with a forlorn shake of his head.

"Do you mean that the satchel was not there, where I told you?" Randall demanded.

"Oui; but more. De sachet ees gone. De theengs you weesh me tak' to White Lac, theem still at de maison of m'sieu Wadleigh, in de shed. But, ole Pitou et Yvonne, they get them bientôt, mabby-so, an' tak' them to de lac. . . . Mais—more, m'sieu."

"What more, then? Tell me the worst, first."

"Ma'm'selle ees gone, aussi."

"Whom do you mean? Miss Maitland?" Dan asked coldly.

"Oui, m'sieu."

"Where has she gone? How did she go away? Nobody can get out of Janver yet, if it is as bad there as here. Where has Miss Maitland gone?"

"Je ne sais pas, m'sieu. C'est fini, mabby-so. Peut-etre eet ees la mort. Mabby she ees dead, by now. Mabby not. Mabby Lightfoot, when he fin' ma'm'selle in de pass, manage, somehow, her to save."

"Lightfoot!? He is here, locked up, at the barracks?"

"Non, m'sieu. Pardon, but eet ees not so. Heem tracks on de mountain, in de pass, that nuit. Jules saw them, for vrais. But, I tell you what Jules theenk, now, m'sieu."

"Be quick, then."

"Listen, m'sieu. I go, dat nuit, to de office of

de chemin de fer, for de sachet. Eet ees morning, but eet ees nuit, aussi bien. I go inside. Somebody already there. He hit Jules on de head —beeng!—so. Jus' like that. Alors, when I wak' oop, eet ees still ver' dark. I go oop de stairs to de office. De sachet ees not there. I fin' fresh snow in de room. Somebody hav' been there; non? Tres bien. Who hav' been there, alors, eef eet ees not Lightfoot, for Lightfoot hav' just comme ovair de mountain. Ver' well. Eef eet ees Lightfoot who hav' been there to tak' away de sachet, then Lightfoot, heem escape from de snow-slide. You see, m'sieu? Parceque, eef de Indian escape, so did ma'm'selle escape. For vrai; non? Oui."

"What is it that you are telling me, Jules?" Dan asked, wearily. "Miss Maitland was not out in that storm that night. What has Lightfoot got to do with it all? What are you saying about snow-slides. Begin at the commencement of things and tell me clearly."

"Ma'm'selle was out in de storm, m'sieu, for true. Oui. She see you cross de top of de ridge, when you start to fin' me at de lac. She try to call to you from de maison where she live, but you not hear her. Bien, she go to Yvonne. She fin', there, dat you have gone for sure, an' that m'sieu Wadleigh have gone, aussi. Alors, she run to de roun' house where de engines are kept. She steal one. She ride to Bluerock. She tak' de snowshoes of Tom Rodman. That mauvais storm, eet catch her in de pass, but she fin' shelter under a rock. . . . Yvonne an' Pitou they start to fin' her, next jour. They fin' where she slept,

safe an' warm. But she have wak' up, an' gone. Eet ees then almos' dark. I comme down de mountain ver' soon from thees side, past de pulpit. Eef I hav' keep on dat way, I fin' ma'm'selle; but I tak' de short cut to de lac. I no fin'. Lghtfoot, heem comme after me. Heem go on down de pass, past where I turn off by de short cut. Heem fin' her where she hav' fall down. Heem pick her up; heem carry her away by dat path along de ledge. When I get to de stone house by de lac, Yvonne she tell me all thees things. Then I go back. I fin' de tracks in la neige, an' where the snow have slide down ovair de ledge. I cannot pass that way. Mabby they buried een la neige; mabby not. Alors, I go on to Janver."

Jules stopped.

Slowly, little by little, Dan comprehended the full meaning of all that had been told to him; but —and the pity of it—he misunderstood what Joyce Maitland's purpose had been in braving the storm of that terrible night.

"Joyce saw me cross the ridge," he said, slowly, more to himself than to Jules, who nevertheless was listening to every word. "You say she tried to call to me, but I do not think that she did. Then she ran to Wadleigh's house; but not to find Yvonne. She went there to find Wadleigh."

"Peut-etre," Jules murmured.

"But Yvonne told her that Ace had gone away, and that I had gone after him, and she stole the engine and went after him, to save him from me."

"Non, no, m'sieu. To save you."

"To save *me?* From what? From whom? From *Wadleigh?*"

"Mabby to save toi from toi-meme," Jules suggested, mildly.

"*To save me from myself?* Oh, no. But to save Wadleigh from me? Yes."

"An', maintenant, mabby ma'm'selle is lost, herself. You not care for that, m'sieu? That mabby ma'm'selle ees out there, een the snow——"

Dan turned his eyes toward the faithful servant and there was such utter misery in the depths of them that Jules stopped midway in what he was about to say. He came to an abrupt pause, and hung his head, half in shame that he had dared to take such liberties with m'sieu's affairs.

"Joyce is not dead, Jules," Dan said, softly. "If she were dead, I would have known it. For her soul is mine, and in death, it would come to me. No; she is not dead. You say that Lightfoot found her? Then Lightfoot saved her. Hush, now. Buxton is coming. You need say nothing of all this, to him."

Buxton came in at the front door.

"Hello, Jules," he said. "I am glad that you are here. Mr. Randall will need you, and at once, I think. Dan, I have just found out something of interest. Lightfoot escaped from the barracks a week ago to-night, and started across the pass within an hour or so of the time you sent Jules away."

"I know. Jules has just told me as much," Dan replied.

"Hurley told me about it, only a few moments

ago. He made a remark about it which made me sit up and take notice."

"What was it?"

"That he does not believe that Lightfoot would have thought of going away on his own account. He was quite comfortable where he was. Which means that Taggart, or Wadleigh, or both of them, sent him, doesn't it?"

"Very likely."

"They heard you tell the captain why you had sent Jules away. They jumped at the conclusion that the little satchel must have contained something of value—so they sent Lightfoot to get it. . . . Did you get it, Jules?"

"Non, m'sieu."

"Then Lightfoot must have got to it, first; eh?"

"I theenk so, m'sieu."

"Dan, I don't know what was in that satchel, but I do know that you wanted it. If Lightfoot got it, he will take it to Taggart as soon as possible. That is why I was so glad to see Jules."

Randall nodded. He was silent for a time, and the others waited. Then he turned to Jules, and said, slowly:

"I want you to pay careful attention to what I shall say, now, Jules. This may be the last opportunity I shall have, for some time to come, to give you instructions."

"Oui, m'sieu. For anytheeng you say, Jules ees ready to serve m'sieu."

"I know. Mr. Buxton and I have been getting ready for what is to come. We have interested some of the men in Magician in my affairs. Mr. Buxton has selected others, whom we are paying,

to fight on our side. Some of the people will be here within a few moments to talk things over. I wish you to remain and hear all that is said. Do you understand?"

"Oui, m'sieu. But why you want Jules to hear all dat?"

"Because, the moment we can get into the pass, we are going to begin work there. Because I am going to fight every inch of the way, if necessary, to get it, and to hold it, and to keep others out of it, and I want you to understand exactly what is necessary to be done in order to accomplish all that."

"Oui, m'sieu."

"Everywhere along the lines of all the railroads, washouts have destroyed the grades, torn up rails and ties, ripped out culverts and bridges, and wrecked things, generally. By to-morrow morning construction gangs will be started out both ways from here, both ways from Janver, and south from Carrolton, and north from Lonecamp, on the M. & J. The P. & H. B. people will have their gangs out by this time, in both directions from Allerton, and from Lonecamp. And the B. S. & L. S. outfits probably began work on that new line they are building into Allerton, two or three days ago. They haven't got these hills to fight, over there."

"Non, m'sieu." Jules did not in the least understand what was coming, but he did know the man who was talking, and he was well aware that Randall never talked idly.

"Mr. Buxton and I have figured that by to-morrow night, or the night of the day following,

there should be between two and three hundred men at work along the line of the P. & H. B., between Allerton and Lonecamp, and another hundred men within reaching distance of Allerton, to the west. Then, northwest of Allerton, on the new line, the B. S. & L. S. should have at least two hundred men at work within a distance of sixty or seventy miles. Now, Jules, listen closely."

"Oui, m'sieu."

"There will be, therefore, approximately, five hundred men at work—experienced men—within forty-eight hours from now, within the radii that I have named. I have already sent out men of my own to find them, and to hire them—for double the pay that they are now receiving. To-night I will send out more men, and to-morrow still more. I intend to hire those construction men away from the P. & H. B., even if I have to pay them three times what they are now getting, in order to put them to work over Magician pass for me. Mr. Buxton has found men who will go after them and hire them for me. By doing that, I will not only get the men I need, but I will cripple old Lionel Gregory so badly that he won't have a leg left to stand on."

"For why do you tell Jules all thees, m'sieu? Je ne sais notting 'bout all these theengs."

"Because I want you to understand the importance of the thing you must do to help me, Jules."

"Oui, m'sieu. Tres bien."

"Along the M. & J., from here around through Rickett's canyon, to Janver, and from there to Carrolton, there will be another two hundred men at work as soon as they can get on the job."

"Oui."

"Until a week ago they were my own men. To-day, more than half of them would come to me if I raised a finger, and would do it without promise of increase of pay. But, with that, I believe that nearly all of them will desert Taggart and Wadleigh. That makes about six hundred men, all told, that I think I can get. Jules, by one week from to-day I want to have every man-jack of that six hundred in Magician pass, at work, or on their way there to go to work'.'

"Say, Dan——" Buxton interrupted, but Randall turned sharply upon him.

"You wait, Bux, until I have finished with Jules," he said. "Now, Jules, unless you can start back, to-night, to find Lightfoot—unless you do find him, and so recover possession of that little satchel, and bring it to me, or to Mr. Buxton—unless you get it to me, with its contents by, or before, the time I have named, the whole business that I have been talking about won't amount to so much as a feather duster in a blast-furnace. Do you get me?"

"But why not, m'sieu?" Jules asked, quietly, and apparently unmoved by Randall's vehemence.

"BECAUSE THAT LITTLE BLACK SATCHEL CONTAINS THE MONEY THAT I WILL NEED TO PAY THOSE MEN; THAT'S WHY?"

"For heaven's sake, Dan!" Buxton began again. "Do you mean to say——"

"I mean to say exactly what I have said, Bux. That little black bag is the throttle of this steam engine, and we've got to get our paws on that, to run it."

"But, Dan, there is just one question that I have to ask, right now."

"Out with it, then."

"What about material to build with? Rails and ties, and spikes, and fish-plates, and about ten thousand other things like that. Eh? What about it?"

"This, Buxton. The material is right where I can lay my hands on it. It is mine, and my money bought and paid for it. Ace Wadleigh and Taggart will call it stealing, but I never heard yet that a man could steal his own property, and be convicted for doing so. Oh, I'll beat them to it, Bux, don't you worry. We'll build the Janver Cut-off, and we'll have it in operation before snow flies to make another winter."

CHAPTER XXII

Preparing for the Contest

The meeting at Buxton's was over.

Jules had remained quietly at one side while Dan Randall was giving out his instructions and general directions to the men who came to the store that night to enlist under his banner, and, apparently, he had paid no attention to what was said or done. But Dan knew that not a word had escaped the vigilant shrewdness of the faithful Frenchman

The entire success of Randall's plans depended upon two things, and two only, now that the title to the property would be brought into question, and that Ace Wadleigh's claim would be supported and backed by the rich and powerful Gregory, with all the force and power of the P. & H. B. and the B. S. & L. S. railroads. Gregory practically owned the former. Certainly he controlled and directed its affairs; and it was authoritatively understood that his word was law in the affairs of the latter. And the two things upon which depended the success of Dan's enormous undertaking were: The recovery of the black satchel and its contents, and the winning over of the men from those two companies and the newly organized M. & J. to the employ of Dan Randall and the Janver Cut-off.

Randall had not spoken idly when he had said that half the men of the M. & J. would rush to him if he so much as raised his finger. He had been their master since the road was rehabilitated. They knew him, and liked him, and believed in him.

Nobody has ever yet been able to determine what quality it is that some men possess which makes them "natural born leaders." But that there is such a quality, and that men, en masse, recognize it instantly and flock to its standard whenever opportunity offers, is not to be denied.

Dan Randall possessed that quality.

More than a year before, at the time when the M. & J. was under construction through Rickett's canyon, the "bully" of the hard-rock men, when he was paid off and was about to take his departure with his fighting crew to seek other jobs, said to Dan, in parting:

"Well, good-by, misther Randall. Whanever ye want my husky-boys to worrruck for ye, all yez'll have to do will be to sind worrrd. Sure, there ain't wan av 'im that wouldn't go plumb to hell f'r ye, if ye should ask it—includin' me own self."

Just now, at the critical moment in Dan's affairs, he knew quite well that in every gang of men in the employ of the two railroads he would have to fight, there was many an individual who had worked for him in the past, and who would, therefore, be not only willing, but eager, to come back to him.

He knew that those men among the gangs who had not actually worked for him, had heard of him, and had talked about him, and that not much

argument would be required to induce them to leave their present jobs to come to him—particularly with the promise of increased pay.

Moreover, he believed that the men actually in the employ of the M. & J. would bitterly resent the fact that he had been deprived of the presidency of the road, and of the power that went with that office. He believed that they would be more than half inclined to go on strike the moment they heard about it. This was another point on which he counted.

Above all things else, he knew that he could not hope to build the cut-off unless he could induce nearly all of those men of the three railroads to forsake the jobs they had, AND TO COME TO HIM.

To the lay mind, which has not been up against such a proposition, this method of procedure may seem unfair—BUT, in railroad construction, everything is fair which wins out. Dan Randall knew that, too, and intended to make the most of it.

So, the time of waiting after the coming of the great thaw had not been an idle, or a wasted time.

Many a trusted messenger had been selected here and there, largely through the advice and assistance of Buxton, and had been sent out to prepare the way, even before it was thought possible that the messengers could get through. And so it happened that Dan's plans were well started at the time when Jules appeared from across the mountains.

That night, after the meeting at Buxton's store, other men were sent out, and the short speech which Dan made to them at the close of the meeting is worth recording.

"I am in this fight to win," he said. "I expect every one of you to be loyal to me. Mr. Buxton and I anticipate entire loyalty; or otherwise, you would not have been selected for this work. But, if there is one among you who has now in the back of his mind a disloyal thought, or an idea of any form of treachery to me, for bigger pay, or for any other reason, he had better resign now, before he starts, for I shall not forgive nor forget such an act, and I shall show no mercy whatever to any man who commits such an act. That's all. You know what you've got to do, and that I expect each one of you to do it. You know what your pay will be, and what the extra rewards will be if you succeed. I don't expect you to work miracles, but I do anticipate very few failures. I'll overlook and forgive failures, or partial failures, but the man who turns traitor to me had better never come within reach of my arm again."

It was midnight when the meeting broke up.

Jules got up from his corner and stood before his beloved master.

"Je suis ready, m'sieu," he said, simply.

"You may start in the morning, as soon as it is light, Jules," Dan replied to him.

"I weel start maintenant, m'sieu. The morning may be too late. I must fin' Lightfoot; non? An' I mus' get de sachet. Ees eet not so, m'sieu?"

"Yes, Jules."

"Mais oui, alors. I go now. Lightfoot, heem likely be on hees way down here already, to fin' m'sieu Taggart. Tres bien. Eef heem come, Jules meet heem, somewhere, mabby, avec the sachet."

"Very well, Jules. Go now, if you like."

"An' eef I fin' heem, I kill heem, mabby?" Jules inquired, placidly. Buxton, who was listening, smiled. Dan shrugged his shoulders.

"No. Not unless it is necessary."

"But, I am to get the sachet anyhow, non?" Jules insisted.

"Yes."

"Then I breeng heem—the sachet—to you, m'sieu?"

"Yes; as soon as possible."

"An' I not return unless I breeng dat sachet?"

"No. Unless you know to a certainty that it has already been delivered into the hands of Taggart or Wadleigh. In that case——"

"Een dat case I get heem anyhow. Non?"

"If you can. Yes."

"Tres bien. I get dat sachet, bientôt, m'sieu. Eet ees fait accompli. Mais, m'sieu, dere ees un theeng plus."

"What is it?"

Jules hesitated. He had been told to say nothing concerning Joyce in the presence of Buxton. But still, before he went out, he felt that he must refer to the possibility of finding her with Lightfoot and detained by him.

"I spik of that place where Lightfoot went out of the pass by the ledge, when the snow-slide fall down," he said, diplomatically. "What weel Jules do, m'sieu, eef heem fin' dat feller what was weeth Lightfoot when dat neige comme down? Mabby dat feller hav' need of Jules. Non?"

Randall was silent a moment. Then he said slowly:

"Jules, I am sending you out to get that satchel, and the things that were inside of it when I left it behind the door in my office. Get it, and get what was in it. I don't care how you get it; but get it. You may use your own judgment, and act as you think best, about everything else that may happen.

"Merci, m'sieu. Merci beaucoup. That ees all."

He went out into the night without another word. When he had gone, Buxton turned to Dan.

"What the dickens was Jules talking about?" he asked, puzzled by what had been said about the snow-slide. "Did Lightfoot take somebody over the pass with him when he escaped from the barracks?"

"No. But it appears that he met somebody, or found somebody, in the pass, when he was almost to the other side of the mountain. Jules found the trails."

"Who was it? Do you know?"

"It was not any man that Jules knew, evidently," Dan replied, evasively. "Apparently the trail was made by the snowshoes of Tom Rodman, the engineer, but it isn't at all likely that Rodman was wearing them at the time. Somebody had taken them without his permission, probably."

Buxton was chipping tobacco from a plug, and dropping it into the hollow of his hand for his pipe. He stopped and fixed his eyes upon Randall.

"Whoever it was, you know. And for some reason you don't want to tell me," he said. "Is

that quite fair, Dan? We ought to be quite frank with each other. Who was it?''

''It was Joyce Maitland, Bux.''

''Good God!'' Buxton said, not irreverently. ''How did she get there?''

Randall shook his head, and made no reply.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Last Night of Idleness

Buxton was seated upon the counter, his legs dangling and swinging idly. He rolled the tobacco between the palms of his hands and filled his pipe and lighted it before he spoke again. Then, very quietly, he said:

"Don't you think, Dan, that you'd better tell me all about it. I do. I want to know, and you want me to know. You see, old chap, we can't work together unless—well, unless we work together. That's about the size of it."

"I have told you all that I know, Bux," Randall replied, as quietly. "That is, all save the news that Jules brought to me about Joyce being out in the snow. And the account of that which Jules gave me, wasn't very clear. It was apparently all that he knew, though."

"Tell me again, then. I wish to be quite clear about it. I want you to be quite clear about it, too, and I don't believe that you are—now."

"I think I am."

"Of course you do. Nobody is denying that. You love Joyce, don't you?"

"I do—more's the pity of it."

"Well, so do I; and this is the first time that I

have confessed it in words, even to myself. And I don't say 'More's the pity of it.' All the same I know that in my own case it is hopeless. She wouldn't love me in a thousand years. Your case isn't hopeless, only, you happen to be too blind, just at present, to realize that important fact. Now, go ahead, and tell me the story from beginning to end. Only, tell me first about that part of it which has to do with the information that Jules brought to you."

"I'll try, Buxton."

"Go ahead. I won't interrupt."

"Jules tells me that Joyce saw me when I crossed the top of the ridge on my way to meet him at White Lake. I stopped there for a moment to put on my snowshoes. I think that I gestured toward the house. He says that she ran outside to call to me. If she did so, I neither saw nor heard her. The latter would be impossible, anyhow."

"Naturally."

"Well, she evidently put on her furs at once, and went to Wadleigh's house. I had come from that direction. She probably thought I had been there to see Ace—which was partly the fact. There isn't any doubt, in my mind, that she was aware of the fact that he had already started to cross the pass. She knew all about the row that had happened between Ace and me. She knows something about my temper. She put two and two together, and she made a rough guess of it that I had started out after Ace Wadleigh. And, she knew that if I had started out after him I would get him. And she knew mighty well what that would mean—or supposed she did."

"Go on."

"She found Yvonne at the house. Yvonne must have told her enough, or admitted enough, to confirm Joyce in her theory that I had started out on the trail of Ace Wadleigh to overtake him and have it out with him."

"Well?"

"When Joyce left Yvonne, she went to the station. Since the big snow, we have kept only one locomotive fired, for emergencies. Tom Rodman, our chief engineer, was not there, evidently. Tom is a great friend of hers. He has taught her a lot about running an engine at one time and another. Joyce didn't find Rodman, but she found the engine and she ran it out of the roundhouse herself."

"What?"

"That's as near as I can get at it. The switches were probably set all right."

"But, why? Why, man, why?"

"Great heaven, Bux, could there be more than one reason why? To overtake Wadleigh and warn him; or to intercept me, and so prevent me from following him and killing him. That's why."

"To prevent you from following Ace Wadleigh and killing him—yes. But it was ten thousand times more to prevent you from committing the deed than to save him from being the victim of it, Dan Randall."

"Rot!"

"Go ahead. What happened after that?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows, but Lightfoot, and Joyce herself."

"What *do* you know? What did Jules tell you?"

"Yvonne and old Pitou went in search of her after they found out that she had taken the engine from the roundhouse. They found her trail, and also a hole under a rock where she had slept in safety through the storm of that night. They figured that she had already made Devil's Pulpit. They knew that there was food and fuel there. They thought she would be safe till another morning. It was too late for them to follow her that night. They went to the stone house at White Lake. They found Jules there. He had passed the pulpit, and knew that Joyce had not been there, so, tired as he was, he started out again to find her."

"Dan, Jules is the bravest and most faithful human being I ever knew," Buxton exclaimed, warmly.

"He is. Jules is Jules. All is said with that."

"Yes."

"He found Lightfoot's trail, first. Then he found where the Indian had come upon Joyce. She had fallen down, apparently. Lightfoot changed Rodman's snowshoes that she was wearing to his own feet, lifted her up, and carried her away; and —don't you see that Joyce must have been alive and practically unharmed, or he wouldn't have done that! He'd have left her where he found her, otherwise. He's an Indian."

"I understand you. Go on, Dan."

"You know that pathway over the ledge, half way down the canyon from the pulpit, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Lightfoot carried her out that way. Jules took the trail. But just where that big stump

stands—you remember it—the snow had slid down over the ledge, and had made it impassable. Jules couldn't go any further. He turned back. There wasn't anything else to do."

"No."

"He hit the Chinook wind when he struck the mouth of the canyon. He knew that the thaw was on, and that if he waited until the next day he might not be able to get to Janver. He was after that satchel. So, instead of returning to the lake, he made straight for Janver. Somebody hit him a blow on the back of his head when, a little before daylight, he let himself into the building. When he came to, and crawled up the stairs to the office, the satchel was gone.

Buxton nodded.

"Jules put two and two together again," Dan continued. "He figured it out that Lightfoot was the only one who could have been there at that time, to hit him, and also the only one who would have had any reason to hit him, being there. And so, if Lightfoot was there, he escaped the snow-slide. If he escaped it, so did Joyce."

"Go on. That isn't all."

"No."

"Jules was tied up in Janver, after that, as everybody else was tied up, wherever one happened to be. But he found out several things."

"What—for instance?"

"Joyce had not been brought back to Janver, so Lightfoot had hidden her away, somewhere else and——"

"Good heavens, man, hasn't it occurred to you that she might be—might be——"

"No, it hasn't. She can't be. She is not dead, or I would know it. I *know* that she is alive, just as well as I know that *you* are alive, Burch Buxton. If she were dead, if anything had happened to her—*I would know it.* That's all."

"What would induce Lightfoot to hide her away, anywhere, and hold her. I'd like to know. What the devil——"

"Wadleigh would. Taggart would, if he thought he could get one on me by doing it. You don't suppose that the satchel business was the only commission that Taggart gave to Lightfoot when he sent him over the mountains, do you? Taggart didn't know what that satchel contained. He was only curious about that. I had said that it was valuable to me, that was all. He wanted to get possession of it on general principles. But you can bet your bottom dollar that the most important errand that the Indian had to do when he was sent over the mountain was to carry some sort of message of information to Joyce Maitland."

"But, great Jehosephat, Dan! Why would Lightfoot carry her away and hide her——"

"He didn't hide her."

"But you just now said that you thought he had done that very thing. And don't you realize the danger that Joyce would be in, alone in the mountains with such a double-dyed scoundrel as that Lightfoot is? Why, Dan——"

"Hold on a minute, Bux. I have thought it all out. I thought it out in about a minute, as soon as I knew about it. She isn't hidden away anywhere without her own consent. She is as safe

with Lightfoot, under the circumstances, as she would be with you or me. Lightfoot is acting under orders, and Joyce is giving these orders just now. You can bet on that."

"Dan, for a man who is uniformly sensible, and sometimes really brilliant, you can on occasion, be more different kinds of a damfool than any person I ever happened to meet . You think that Joyce has betrayed you, while all the time——"

"Wait, Bux. I've got to interrupt you again."

"Well?"

"I came down from Carrolton after that other storm, when nobody—Wadleigh, and Taggart, and Joyce, least of all—believed for a moment that I would even attempt to get through, let alone make it'.'

"Well, you did make it."

"Yes. I made it. An engine took me from Carrolton to Powelton—to a point about two miles this side of it, where we ran into drifts that were as solid as rocks. From there I fought and dug and shoveled my way through as far as Hopesend, which, for the first time in my life, I thought was well named. I stayed there twelve hours, and started on again. I made Corinseca, somehow, and from there I cut across into Janver. I got in at night—too late to go to see Joyce at her home. But I called her up on the phone. Got that?"

"Yes."

"I told her a lot of things over the telephone that I should have kept to myself—principally about the Cut-off. Get me?"

"Of course I understand you."

"Well, put this into your pipe and smoke it. The

information which I gave to her over the wire that night, which nobody else knew anything about, was in the possession of the whole Wadleigh-and-Taggart bunch at the stockholders' and directors' meeting the next day. And it could not have been in their possession if Joyce Maitland had not told it all to Ace. That information was used against me. My stock in the company, which stood in the name of Joyce Maitland, and for which I held proxies, was voted against me by Ace Wadleigh, who held later proxies from her, which also revoked those which I held. Later, she appeared at the meeting, and when she understood that I had been ousted from everything that concerned the company, she seemed quite well satisfied that it was so. Still later, when I was giving Wadleigh the thrashing that he so well deserved, she entered the office behind me, jerked the whip from my hand, and struck me senseless with the butt of it. Later still, when she saw me crossing the ridge, in pursuit of Ace, as she supposed, she started out to save him from me. And still later, when I encountered Wadleigh at the ruins of the record office in this town, he admitted to me that it was Joyce who had knocked me down with the quirt-butt. Now, Buxton, that is very nearly the whole story. It isn't quite all of it, but it is enough. And now I'll tell you exactly how I feel about it all."

"Well?"

"I love Joyce Maitland. She, deep under the surface of things, loves me. On the surface she does not—and just now it is only the surface of things that she is seeing. Wait. Don't interrupt

me. I want to get this business out of my system, for the present. Afterward, we will not refer to it."

"Go on."

"Just what Wadleigh has said or done to convince her that she does not care so very much for me, and which makes her believe that she does care a whole lot for him, I don't know. Only this: She knows, or thinks she knows, about that past of mine. She knows, now, that I came to this part of the world a fugitive from justice, and that I hid myself away in the Great Slave lake country, with only Jules for company because of that fact. What she did not know, or did not find out for herself, Ace has told her, or helped her to discover. What she *doesn't* know, now, and what *I* did not know, myself, until I searched that belt which Jules took from the body of the dead man at Devil's Pulpit, is—well, it might have served to change her attitude. As the case stands now, Joyce has selected her own course. She can follow it just as far as she likes, but after a time she will find that it is a pretty rough road which she has elected to travel. And now, Buxton, we'll drop this subject, if you please. I'm going to build a railroad over Magician pass, and I'm going to begin it at once. I'm going to build another one through Black gorge, and I'm going to begin that one, mighty bientôt, as Jules would say."

"There is just one thing more that I wish to say before we leave the subject," Buxton said rather sharply as Randall left his chair and moved away across the floor.

"Say it, and have done with it," Dan replied.

"What if Joyce Maitland *is* in trouble? What if she is dead? What if Lightfoot——"

Randall wheeled upon Buxton.

"Great God, man, don't you suppose that I have thought of all that?" he cried out. "Not one of the things you would suggest is possible without my certain knowledge of the fact. This is not superstition. It is heart-knowledge. I would *know.* Deep down in her heart and soul, Joyce Maitland is just as much a part of me as if we had been married to each other a thousand years ago and had passed every minute and second of the intervening time together. Just now she is the victim of Ace Wadleigh's deceptions and lies. Very well, let her get her fill of them. Let them both go the limit. But she knows, and Wadleigh knows, for I have told them both—this: *He* shall not have her. *She* shall not become his wife. If their affairs ever progress as far as that point, Buxton, I'll kill Ace Wadleigh. That's all. Now, drop it."

"But——"

"Drop it, I say. I'm going to build that cut-off and all hell shan't stop me."

CHAPTER XXIV

Beginning the Fight

The busiest man on earth for the next ten days was Dan Randall.

The feats of travel he accomplished were amazing. The ability to organize and execute that he demonstrated was wonderful, and almost unbelievable. The tasks which he performed, the details that he met and mastered, and the stunts he set for himself, and did, were miraculous.

Men flocked to him from whatsoever source they were sought and asked.

Hard-rock men, skinners, linemen, mere laborers with more or less experience as the case might be, bosses, foremen, bullies—hard-boned, square-jawed, iron-thewed, giant-muscled, fighting men, all—flocked to Dan Randall's summons in pairs, and trios, and quartettes, in dozens and in scores.

They came from the line of the P. & H. B. in squads and gangs. From points to the eastward of Lonecamp, all the way around the southern spurs of the Lantowas and the Badgers to Allerton toward the west, they abandoned their jobs and hastened to join the forces of the man they liked to work for; and they brought reports that still others were coming in from points west of Allerton.

More than two hundred more, all told, came from the new line of the B. S. & L. S. that was under construction from Allerton, northwest to Kichen-kah.

Whole companies of men who had been working for the M. & J. (Randall's own property until it was stolen from him, as we have seen) threw down their tools at his call—and picked them up again to start upon a joyous, and sometimes hilarious, march across the mountains and ravines and gullies and streams, to help to build the Janver Cut-off, and to fight for it with all the savagery of primordial men, if they should be called upon to fight.

The details of how these men were found, and informed of Dan's need of them, are not necessary.

The messengers and agents selected by Randall and Buxton to do the preliminary work of finding and engaging the services of those toilers did their work well and quickly. The men who were sought responded with enthusiasm. They flocked to him as with one accord; and whenever there was one or more who hesitated they were easily and quickly persuaded by the others.

With advance money in their pockets, and the promise of double pay, and sometimes triple their ordinary wages, on the job—and with the prospect of working under such a man as Big Chief Randall, as he was fondly called by many of them—there was no hesitation

They started. They got there, too.

Wherever it was possible they impressed locomotives and flat cars into their service, and forced

the engineers and trainmen to do their will and to take them as far as the rails were in condition. At wash-outs (which they were supposed to be there to mend) they deserted the lines of graded roadway and took to the hills and ravines for short cuts. It was like a rush for the gold fields in the old days.

Skinners mounted their mules, and dragged their scrapers, bottoms up, after them; and often helped along the hated "hard-rockers" as if they were brothers, instead of the sworn enemies they always were when on the jobs.

Scores of other men of all classes and sorts, went all the way afoot; and there was almost every nationality under the sun represented among them.

Some of them fought their way from points near Allerton, through the Black gorge, and across the Janver valley and the ridge, to the western entrance to Magician pass. Some came down by way of the ripped-up, washed-out line of the M. & J. from Carrolton on the one hand, and Nelson on the other, to the same point.

Many more came up through the Janver valley from the southern bow of the P. & H. B. and others came south from toward Rickett's canyon, or north from Lonecamp and below there, into Magician, and so to the eastern entrance to the pass.

Buxton deserted his store and went over the pass to receive the men at the western end of it, with a half dozen of well-selected helpers to aid him. Randall took charge at the eastern end, near Magician, because that was the point where trouble was most likely to occur.

But it was not the wonder of securing the ser-

vices of the workers so much as the marvel of having the material at hand to work with, that was most amazing among Dan Randall's accomplishments, at that time. He had proved himself to be a remarkable planner and organizer during those ten days which followed upon the departure of Jules Legarde from the store in search of Lightfoot and the little black bag.

He had very long ago foreseen part of the present emergency, and the contest that must come with it. Not precisely in the shape it had taken, for then it had never even remotely occurred to him that his own railroad company with Ace Wadleigh and the others would be among his opponents.

But he had anticipated a fight with old Lionel Gregory and the P. & H. B. people, and he had in every possible way made ready for that fight. In doing so he had builded better than he knew.

If he had really anticipated exactly what he would have to meet and overcome when things came to a show-down, caution and care might have overleaped themselves, and more than likely he would not have been half so well prepared as he was. All through the preceding summer and fall Dan had been getting ready to build the Cut-off. He had worked secretly and kept his affairs to himself.

He had ordered from the East and had had shipped to convenient points, ties, and rails, and spikes, and fish-plates, and axes, and picks, and shovels, and giant powder, and dynamite, and fulminating caps, and fuses, and drills, and sledges, and stationary engines and boilers, and dynamos,

and wire, and lamps, and mules and horses, and oxen, and carts—and all of the general paraphernalia and what-not that is required to construct a railroad, whether it be long or short.

He had managed to make it appear that all of the material was destined for use in making general repairs on the existing line of the M. & J., and for the construction of the proposed and heretofore much talked-about extension between Carrolton and Allerton.

It was merely a happy accident that Dan had not taken Ace Wadleigh and Taggart into his confidence concerning those shipments. It had never occurred to him that both men would not be in with him, up to their ears, when the time came for the actual building of the Cut-off. He had intended to make their fortunes, as well as to add largely to his own.

But it had been his own money that bought and paid for the stuff, just as it had been his own money that had financed and put upon its feet again, the very nearly defunct M. & J. R. at the time he had invited Wadleigh to go in with him.

Dan's only idea in preserving secrecy concerning the purchase and receipt of the material had been to keep the knowledge of it from old Gregory and the P. & H. B. people; and Dan was a thorough believer in the idea that if you reveal a secret to one person you tell it to all the world.

So even Ace Wadleigh had not known about it. And so even Joyce Maitland had not known about it. And also, the shipments being many, and the points of delivery being likewise as many, the

actual quantity of the material had not been suspected, and, if any of it had been noticed at all, it was supposed to be for general repairs and for the extension.

Fate, destiny, whatever one pleases to call it, had done the rest. Luck, maybe.

For surely it was luck that had induced Dan Randall to dig and fight his way for more than sixty miles through the snow of the last great storm but one, in time to be present in Janver at the directors' meeting which had so glibly voted him out of his own property and possessions.

Luck, and love; for it had been the strong desire to see Joyce Maitland and to hear her voice that had induced him to take his life in his hands to make that hazardous journey. He had known, too, that if he did not make it when he did, there would be little hope of his getting through for weeks to come.

And so he had arrived in Janver the night before the meeting; too late to see the girl he loved, but not too late to converse with her over the telephone. The fateful consequence of that conversation, and of the stockholders' and directors' meeting of the M. & J. R. R. Co., we already know.

The workers, as fast as they arrived on the job, were divided into "camps," and "gangs," and "squads," each one with its accredited leader, whom Dan selected, and these were sent out again to hustle-in the piled-up material from the several depots where it had been delivered.

One of these depots was a station twelve miles south from Magician, on the M. & J.; another was

Fairview, fifteen miles to the north. Still another one was Bluerock, across the mountains, near Janver. All three were within comparatively easy access to the two ends of the pass over which the Cut-off was to be constructed.

At the very beginning-of-the-end of the time of waiting—to be exact, on the very morning following the departure of Jules in search of Lightfoot—Wadleigh and Taggart decided to "beat it" for Allerton, at which place they had good reason to know that Gregory would show up at the first possible moment. And considering the general condition of affairs it was important that they should consult with him at once.

The idea that Randall would find it possible to start things moving without delay did not occur to either of them. That Dan would have the hardihood and the sand to seize the piled-up material that had been collected at the various points was not even thought of. They did not know nor suspect Randalls' resources financially as well as mentally, and they anticipated nothing more serious than a fight in the courts over the title to the property and right of way across the pass, and old Gregory's known methods were such that they only smiled complacently to themselves whenever they stopped to consider that point.

Gregory would win out in the courts. Never once had they any doubt of that. And while he was winning, he would also have his men and his money working. The end would, therefore, be the same, whether Randall should succeed in proving his claims, or should not.

"We'll get down the line somehow, to-morrow,"

Wadleigh had told Taggart. "Randall can't do a thing here, now, any more than we can."

"All the same," Taggart replied, "we don't know what the red-coats have dug up, out-a them ruins, Ace. It seems to me that one of us ought to stay right here, on the job. There ain't only one of us needed in Allerton."

"Nonsense. You can leave all that part of the business to old Gregory, safely. *He* will know just what to do. In the meantime I'll put a flea into the ear of Badmington and Hurley that they'd better go mighty slow till they hear from the old man."

They got as far as Holdup without much difficulty. There they learned that below Holdup, and in several places between there and Lonecamp, were washouts and bad places, which would make it impossible for an engine to get through for several days to come. So they took horses.

Before they reached Lonecamp, they began to hear disquieting rumors.

The men who should have been at work along the line between Holdup and Lonecamp were not where they should have been. They had deserted. They had taken their tools and had marched away —and there did not seem to be any definite information as to where they had gone, or why they had insisted upon going.

At places where gangs of twenty, or fifty, men should have been busily at work, repairing the roadbed there was nobody.

"It looks like Randall's work," Taggart said, when they were still half a day out of Lonecamp. Wadleigh shook his head and said nothing. But

he pushed on toward the junction with the P. & H. B., which was the southern terminus of his own road, with all the haste he could command.

At Lonecamp he found the information he sought in an entirely unexpected and a distinctly disturbing manner.

They had abandoned their horses at a small station fifteen miles to the north, and had come in on a hand car which they had had to work themselves; and because of the difficulties they had encountered and the muscular strain they had been compelled to undergo, and the natural disquiet they both felt, they were neither of them in the best of humors.

As they pumped their hand car toward the station at Lonecamp, both realized at the same instant that there was a disturbance of some sort at the roundhouse across the tracks, and they hastened in that direction. There they quickly found an answer to every question that had been puzzling them.

Two hundred or more men had formed a circle around two of their number, who were stripped to their waists and fighting each other as cats or dogs might have fought. The spectators were shouting encouragement to their respective champions, urging them on with joyous cursings while near at hand a steamed-up locomotive stood panting, coupled to a day-coach.

Then, high above all the noises and shouting, Wadleigh heard one vociferous voice cry out:

"Go to it, Mike, you red-headed bobcat! Get him. Kill him. Give him the heel! It's us

f'r the Cut-off, if you win! An' it's *me* for the Cut-off, anyhow. Hurrah for Big Chief Dan, an' the Janver Cut-off. Yell, damn ye! Yell!''

Wadleigh knew, then, what the matter was.

CHAPTER XXV

The Fight at Lonecamp

Wadleigh and Taggart arrived upon the scene just in time for the finish.

The pitched battle between the two bullies was over, had been won and lost when they got there, and the victor—the one whom his admirer among the onlookers had called Mike—turned his grimy and blood-stained face, of which one eye had been effectually closed and the other one nearly so, first in one direction and then another.

"Sure, if there's anywan here who wants a bit av th' same medicine, now's the time to get it," he said. "If there's anny P. & H. B. skinner standin' around that wants a lickin' step up to th' captain's office, says I."

Nobody responded.

"Aw, come down off'n the perch, Mike. Didn't they say they'd let us have the engine, an' no questions asked, if you licked Thibault? So, what's the——"

The protester stopped.

No one had seen the approach of the two who had arrived on the hand car. The excitement at the close of the battle had been too intense for them to take note of its coming.

Seven out of every ten in that crowd knew Ace

Wadleigh by sight. There was not one there who did not instantly know Taggart—and there were a good many who had, in times gone by, felt the weight of Taggart's hands, and the strength of his muscles, for he had always been a bully of bullies.

It was Wadleigh who stepped forward, first, but Taggart came up beside him, and said, in a low tone, before Wadleigh could speak:

"You'd better let me handle this bunch, Ace. I knew 'em better'n you do. . . . What's goin' on here, boys?" he added, raising his voice and addressing the crowd generally.

A dead silence followed the question.

Every pair of eyes in the throng that had gathered to witness the fight was turned upon the newcomers; and, as if the presence of these two men demanded it, the two factions of that throng drew apart and faced each other, very evenly divided as to numbers. Wadleigh and Taggart stood together between the two factions, confronting Mike Reardon, the victor of the fight. Thibault, the loser, was still in a groggy half stupor, on the ground.

Reardon grinned, although the grin was a literal facial contortion.

"Maybe ye can see f'r yerself wot it's about, Ben Taggart, if ye'll take a squint at Thibault," he said. "He thought he could lick me—*me!* Well, there's the answer. Look at him."

"But, what is it all about?" Taggart insisted. "What are you doing here, Reardon? Thibault belongs to my own outfit; but you, and the best part of that bunch behind you, are P. & H. B. What——?"

"Not on your life we ain't P. & H. B., Taggart. We've sunk our last drill, an' shot our last blast f'r ole Lyin' Gregory. We're on our way to——" he stopped.

"Well, where to, Reardon?"

"That, I take it, is none uh y'r dommed business, Taggart. An', say! There ain't anny wan of my bunch that likes ye anny too well, so ye'd best not be shootin' off y'r mouth just now, too much to suit 'em."

Taggart's reply was characteristic of him.

Like lightning his big right arm was drawn backward and then shot forward, and his fist caught the half-blinded fighter squarely on the least injured of the two cheek bones. And Taggart's fist was not light when it landed in that manner.

Reardon went down.

He had not expected the blow It is doubtful if he could have seen it sufficiently well to have avoided it, had he done so.

It would have been far better, under the circumstances, had Taggart permitted Wadleigh to do the talking. Diplomacy would have accomplished much more with the men, in their present mood, than Taggart's tactics.

And Taggart's act angered every one who saw it, even to the men who, otherwise, would doubtless have sided with him. But to knock down, thus brutally, the victor of the battle that had just been waged, and him half blind from the effect of Thibault's blows, was more than their sense of fair-dealing would stand for.

A dozen men from the line-up on Reardon's side

rushed forward the instant the blow fell and the little shouter who had yelled encouragement to Thibault only a moment before was first among them.

It was he, perhaps, who saved Taggart from a terrible beating at the hands of the crowd, for he dived at his legs, tripped him, and dragged him down before the infuriated men could reach him with their hands and fists.

The men who had lined up on the opposite side made a half-hearted effort to rescue him, but succeeded only in getting their heads punched, for, while the two factions had been about equally divided previous to Taggart's act, the cowardly blow had made many of Reardon's former opponents transfer their sympathies. Fully half of the number who had championed Thibault sprang instantly into opposition of Taggart, and all that Taggart represented.

Wadleigh and Taggart were hustled to one side, forced through the open door of an empty freight car, and, despite their protestations, were told to stay there; or, if they didn't, they'd wish they had.

Ace Wadleigh had not lost his mental poise for a moment. He saw, and read between the lines, the true meaning of what was happening.

The fire-up locomotive, with the coach attached to it, the gang of men from down the line of the P. & H. B., which numbered nearly a hundred, their evident desire to get north, toward Magician, the plain fact that in order to do so they were about to take forcible possession of the engine and car, and were opposed by a mingled group of P.

& H. B. men and M. & J. railroad men, told the tale quite plainly to him.

He stepped to the open door of the freight car and called aloud to Reardon, whom he knew, personally, and in whom he recognized the leader of the deserters.

Reardon had not entirely recovered from Taggart's blow, but he was on his feet, nevertheless. He moved forward, somewhat unsteadily, toward the freight car.

"You hold y'r gab f'r a minute, Wadleigh," he said, thickly. "I've got something that I want-a say to Ben Taggart. Afther I've said it, I'll talk to you, mebby."

Taggart thrust his own bulk forward into the car door.

"Well, what have you got to say to me, Reardon?" he demanded. "Just some of the same old threats, 'cause I handed you one? Eh?"

"Just that, Ben Taggart—an' a little more of it, mebby."

"Go on, then, an' say it. Get it out-a your system," Taggart laughed aloud, derisively.

"It ain't much. Ye won't heed it. But it's comin' true."

"Oh, is it?"

"It's this: I'm goin' to pay ye up f'r what ye done to me, just now. That wasn't no square blow. You'n me never did come to a clinch. Taggart, but I've always thought I could lick ye, an' some day I'm going to do it. An' whin I do, God help ye! That's all. Now, Ace Wadleigh, what have *you* got to say about it?"

"This," Wadleigh replied. "I am now the

president of the M. & J. That engine and car over there across the tracks is my property. I can see that you and your men are determined upon taking them and using them. If you do that, you will do it by force, and riot, and theft, and I will hold you accountable. It may be that you have the courage to defy me, and my protest, but dare you defy the law? Dare you defy the authority of the Northwest Mounted Police? Answer me that. For that is precisely what you and your men will be up against."

For one instant Reardon hesitated.

He turned his battered head hastily from side to side to get an idea of the thoughts of his followers. A storm of hoots and jeers came to him—hoots and jeers at Wadleigh, and Wadleigh's words. A score of the men turned and clambered into the waiting car. Two, who had qualified as engineer and fireman, jumped into the cab of the engine, and one of them pulled the whistle-cord, emitting a shrill blast of defiance at Wadleigh's words.

"I guess, mebby, ye've got y'r answer, Wadleigh," Reardon replied, with a grimace.

"Think again, Reardon. You will regret it."

"Aw, go to hell!" was Reardon's reply as he turned away.

"Wait a moment," Wadleigh called after him. Reardon stopped, but he did not turn. Instead he addressed his own men.

"Pile in, boys," he said. And he watched them until almost to a man they had done so. Then he turned toward Wadleigh again.

"Listen here, to me, Ace Wadleigh," he said. "We ain't afraid uh you, nor of y'r one hoss rail-

road. As for the police—we'll deal with them when we get to 'em. As f'r us, we're bound f'r Magician pass, under orders, an' we're goin' to worrrk f'r a *man!* I guess, mebby, ye don't know the meanin' of that worrrd anny too well. but if you and Taggart show up, up there at the pass, we'll show ye what it means all right. As f'r the engine an' carrr, faith I won the use of them in a fair fight wid Thibault an' even you can't deny that he's in charge down here, and he's got the say of what shall be done wid th' rollin' stock, in the absence of written orders to the contrary. An' it's me that knows that there ain't another blessed thing here that belongs to the M. & J. The rails, an' the ties, an' th' hull bloomin' business around here is all the property of the P. & H. B., an' you only have the use of it because it's the junction, and—aw, what's the use. To hell wid ye, Wadleigh; an' you, too, Taggart."

He wheeled and climbed upon the engine.

"G'wan!" he ordered. "Don't ye see what's comin'?"

He pointed up the road toward the more thickly settled portion of Lonecamp, and all could see that many people were approaching the scene at the roundhouse, and in front of those who were coming were two red-coated officers. Somehow, the news of the disturbance had reached the village.

Wadleigh, from his raised position inside the freight car, saw them also, and he believed that he knew a way to stop the engine, which at that instant started forward.

He took a flying leap from the open door of the car.

Twenty rods distant there was a switch, and he knew that if he could reach it before the engine did so he could derail the locomotive and ditch it.

The distance he had to go to reach the switch was less than half that which the engine had to travel, and the chances were in his favor when he made the effort.

But Reardon saw the act, and understood what it meant.

Half blind as he was, he did not hesitate. He knew that if Wadleigh should get to the switch in time the engine would have to pull up, and that every man of his party would be placed under arrest forthwith.

"Open her up, Wink!" he shouted at the man who held the throttle. Then he climbed through the front of the cab, and ran over the boiler until he dropped upon the cow-catcher. In his right hand he held a stick of the terrible dynamite to the use of which he was so accustomed that it amounted, in his hands, to little more than a plaything.

Wadleigh reached the switch while the now speeding engine was yet a dozen yards away from it. He half turned his head to discover just how near to him the locomotive had got before he attempted to throw the lever.

Reardon had figured upon that very act. He was prepared for it.

He was standing upright on the cow-catcher, clinging with his left hand to the headlight and brandishing the stick of dynamite in his right hand, when Wadleigh turned.

"If ye touch that switch, I'll blow ye to hell, Wadleigh!" Reardon yelled at him.

Wadleigh saw, and understood. He hesitated, if only for an instant; but that instant was all that was required.

The onrushing engine was gaining speed with every plunge of the pistons. There were only the tender and the single car attached to it. With a roar, and the rapid spitting of the exhausts, engine and tender and car flew past him and out upon the track that led away toward the north—and Reardon, with a loud laugh of derision, tossed the stick of deadly stuff to the ground, at Wadleigh's feet, knowing that the slight jar would not explode it.

"See how near ye come to goin' where ye belong, Wadleigh?" he shouted.

The engine, and the car with its hundred odd passengers, flew onward. Reardon clambered back into the cab.

"Wink," he said, to the acting engineer, "when ye cross the bridge over Bear creek, slow up an' stop her about a hundred feet beyant it. Faith, they'll be gittin' out another engine an' follyin' us, if ye don't."

"What are ye goin' to do, Mike?" the man asked him, uneasily.

"Sure, Wink, if ye don't know, ye won't be held accountable for it, will ye? An' if there ain't anny bridge there to cross, f'r thim that takes after us, they can't folly, can they?" Reardon replied, as he reached into his kit for more of the dynamite.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Voices Over the Wire

Midnight.

A chain of electric lights gleamed brightly along the entire length of Magician pass, from the Y-shaped entrance at the eastern end of it to the narrow, small-end-of-the-horn-gateway-to-the-canyon, at the Janver side of the mountain.

If an "old-timer" had been dropped down there suddenly and without warning, and with no information of what was going forward, he would have stood appalled.

In the glaring arc-lights, the flare of the forges, and the light of the gleaming camp fires and cook fires, human figures flitted about, horses and mules labored, the clatter of rock-drills echoed and re-echoed among the crags and rocks, the voices of teamsters sounded raucously upon the night air. The general din made by hundreds of laboring men at work told plainly enough that some great enterprise as going forward with all the energy and speed that the will of a determined leader could bring to bear upon the occasion.

The Janver Cut-off was being built with a speed and energy that was phenomenal.

The scene of the small fight between two men, at Lonecamp, was only one of many which were

similar in character, toward every point of the compass from which either end of the pass could be approached. And they came, willing and eager, from all directions at once, for Randall seemed to have imparted his own superlative energy to every one of the hundreds of men who flocked to his support, and to work for him.

Many were sent to bring in the stored material from the various depots; others began with their picks, and spades, and scrapers, their drills and their dynamite, almost before there was time for them to catch their breath from their journeys.

The great rock-bound grotto at Devil's Pulpit was turned into an engine room for dynamos and cable machinery. Wood was stripped from the mountainsides for fuel, and within ten days from the time of that fight at Lonecamp, the real work of blasting and digging, of leveling and filling-in, of grading and remodeling the entire character of the pass, was begun.

Directly across either end of the pass Dan erected a fort-like barricade, as soon as the material for the construction of the road had been brought into it, and no person was permitted to go in, or out of, either of those two inclosures, without a written pass from him.

Nor did outsiders discover that there were such things as barricades at the ends of the pass until days after the actual work of the construction of the road over the mountain was begun.

The reason for this is obvious.

The men who worked for Dan had been drawn, without an exception, from the employees of the three railways already mentioned; and their de-

sertion of their former employers had so crippled the opening up of those roads that they had been rendered practically helpless.

It is true that Wadleigh, after the scene down at Lonecamp, had been made to understand only too well what was going on; and that he had left Taggart to hasten on to Allerton to see old man Gregory, while he himself had lost no time in getting back to Magician with as little delay as possible.

But even when he returned there he was helpless.

There was nothing that he could do.

The forces that he would have worked with, the leverages which he might have brought to bear against Randall, were all at the opposite side of two ranges of mountains.

The railroads were impassable, telegraph wires were still working irregularly and inaccurately, and he was as helpless to interfere with this masterly preliminary stroke of Randall's, as a man at one end of a telephone wire is powerless to punch the fellow who sasses him at the other end.

Day by day Wadleigh had seen squads of men arrive, and go into the pass; and he knew that many of them had been workers along the line of what he now called his own road.

And he had seen them come out again, and return, later still, with the hoarded-up materials. He knew, by implication, that the same sort of thing was taking place over at the opposite end of the pass, near Janver. He realized that Randall was thoroughly provided with material, as well as with workers to use it. For once,

Ace Wadleigh knew himself to be utterly powerless.

He tried haranguing the workers as they arrived. They laughed at him, and jeered him—and incidentally told him some unpleasant truths about what they thought of him—and the place they considered a suitable destination for him and his belongings.

He sought Captain Badmington, and Sergeant Hurley, and begged them to interfere; but those two officers shrugged their shoulders and replied that they would gladly do so if he would show them sufficient authority for the act. He threatened them with dire consequences, and the wrath of Lionel Gregory, if they insisted upon keeping their hands off, but they only smiled and repeated what they had already said.

Nevertheless, they did keep their hands off.

Personally, they both favored Randall, and, while they would not have hesitated to do their duty on that account, they nevertheless refrained from attempting anything that was not, quite plainly, their duty.

Wadleigh finally succeeded in getting a wire through to Regina, with a full account of the proceedings, and begged that peremptory orders be forwarded from there to Captain Badmington; and he received the curt reply that Captain Badmington was perfectly competent to attend to the matter on the ground, and that no such orders could be sent by telegraph, in the absence of more explicit grounds for forwarding them.

He begged the great Lionel Gregory, by telegraph, to use his influence with the Canadian au-

thorities to bring about the immediate interference of the all-powerful N. W. M. P.; and Gregory did try. But Mr. Gregory had no better or more explicit information on the subject than Wadleigh could offer, himself, and hence—nothing could be done save in the regular, red-tape manner, and entirely according to stereotyped legal procedure.

Meanwhile Randall was saying nothing—and sawing wood.

During that time of enforced inaction on the part of Gregory, Wadleigh, Taggart and others, and of the crippled railroads and wires, Randall succeeded in accomplishing all of the necessary preliminary work of his big enterprise.

He got his men, his tools, his materials, and everything that he needed, on the spot, and he built forts at either end of the pass, to protect and hold it—and he was resolved to hold it against all comers, until that railroad across the pass was completed, no matter what might happen thereafter.

But things do have an end—or the beginning of one.

The B. S. & L. S., the P. & H. B., and the M. & J. railroads brought in other men from outlying points, and the several lines succeeded at last in getting their railroads into fairly good working order.

Thus old Gregory came at last to Magician.

Taggart, in the meantime, had crossed the Badger Range, through Black Gorge, to Janver—and Taggart had collected before he started, and had taken with him, nearly two hundred daredevil fighting men of his own selection. For Taggart's

method was to use force first, and the law, afterward, and he meant to fight and force his way into Magician pass, if he could get into it in no other way.

Nor had Gregory been idle in that respect.

His crafty old brain had been plotting and planning ceaselessly during all the time that Wadleigh was burning the wires with information of what was going on. The great man had done some of the same sort of burning, although his operations might better have been called "pulling wires," rather than "burning" them. Nor did he ride into Magician in his special car, unattended. Within an hour or so after him, there arrived another special which brought three hundred more workers—and fighters, if they should be called upon to fight.

He had about the same ideas for an attack at the eastern end of the pass as Taggart had considered for the western end of it. Gregory and Taggart had understood each other fairly well before they separated.

Also, and not to be belittled, Gregory took with him to the scene of operations, full legal authority to order a halt upon the work that Randall was rushing forward. He had only to have his papers duly served, to render Randall an outlaw if he should refuse to obey their mandates.

But it was one thing to have the influence to obtain the papers, and quite another thing to serve them properly, and to enforce them, after they were served, as we shall see.

That is why this chapter began with the word Midnight.

For it was midnight between two certain dates, when Gregory and Wadleigh, at one end of the pass, and Taggart and Cuthbert and Crosby at the other end, set out with their followers at their heels to serve the original papers on the one hand, or certified copies of the same on the other.

They had figured it out that Randall could have no warning of what was coming.

They reasoned that the man who was building the Cut-off that was to bankrupt one railroad and bring another one figuratively to its knees, would be taken unawares, and would not hesitate to show himself, as he had done inevitably, when called upon. Neither of the leaders doubted that the papers would be served on Randall at one end of the pass or the other, that night.

As a matter of fact, Dan had ridden into Magician that very morning exactly as he had done many times since the beginning of his operations in the pass, and they believed that they would find him as unprepared for their coming as they had anticipated and hoped.

Dan, however, had sources of information at his command which they did not suspect. He was always an apostle of preparedness.

Midnight, therefore, of that particular date, found Dan Randall seated inside of a shanty that he had erected for his own use at the Devil's Pulpit. The interior of that room closely resembled, to the educated eye, the office of a train dispatcher and a telephone exchange combined.

Telegraph and telephone wires ran into it from both directions. Keys and sounders, and relays, clicked noisily upon the big square table, and there

was an operator beside each sounder, and a man with a head-piece receiver fast to his ears at each of the telephones; and all of them seemed to be writing all the time, furiously, as if their lives depended upon what they were doing.

At the desk where Randall was seated, a dictagraph stood close by, so that it would speak directly into his ear when the switch was thrown in upon it.

Did you ever hear a dictagraph speak into a room? It is like a man talking, voice and all. It is astounding and uncanny, but very real.

Both hands of the clock against the wall pointed at exactly midnight when one of the telephone operators threw in the dictagraph switch, and Buxton's voice from the western end of the pass, sounded in that shanty room as plainly as if he had been present in person.

"Taggart and his men are coming," he said. "They are now more than half way here from Bluerock station. Any orders?"

"Keep them out, that's all," Dan replied. "Keep them out, no matter how you do it."

Then, after a moment another voice spoke into the room, quietly, and to the point. This one from the eastern end.

"Wadleigh and his bunch are coming," it said. "They're about half way between here and Magician. Should be here in fifteen minutes. Any orders, chief?"

"Yes. Keep them out at any cost. I'm coming right down to you."

Two minutes later he started for the Magician end of the pass.

CHAPTER XXVII

First Blood

A hundred yards from the eastern end of the pass the two hundred and more men who were led by Ace Wadleigh and old Lionel Gregory, came to a halt.

Three of their men who had been sent on in advance, as scouts, returned, and that same Thibault who had met with such summary punishment at the hands of Mike Reardon, at Lonecamp, reported.

"They're ready for us, Mr. Wadleigh," he said, with a grim smile. "There ain't no such thing as gittin' past that fort of theirs, tonight, unless they're willin' to let us do it. Not nohow."

Gregory came up beside Wadleigh. Thibault faced them. Behind him were the two remaining scouts.

"What's the matter?" Gregory demanded, querulously. "Why don't we go ahead? What are we waiting here for? Who gave the order to halt?"

"I did," Wadleigh replied, sharply. "I told you that Randall would be prepared for us, Mr. Gregory," Wadleigh replied.

"Well, he dare not keep us out of the pass. It's

a public highway over the mountain. Besides, I've got the papers——''

''But you haven't served the papers—yet,'' Wadleigh interrupted, with a slow smile.

''That's precisely what we're here for—to serve them, isn't it?''

''Yes; but first we must find somebody to serve them on. And that particular 'somebody' happens to be Randall, himself. Mr. Gregory, the plain fact is that we've got to fight our way to him before we can serve them. He isn't likely, now, to step out here in front of us, and show himself. It seems pretty certain that we can't get to him tonight. We'll have to wait till morning to do that.''

''Why?''

''Ask Thibault. He will tell you.''

The old man faced about.

''What's the matter, Thibault?'' he demanded. ''What's in the way?''

''It's a regular fort, sir,'' Thibault replied. ''They have built it straight across the end of the pass, where it begins to narrer. That's what.''

''What kind of a fort? It isn't anything that we can't get past, is it?''

''I reckon it is, sir—anyhow, between now an' daylight.''

''We've got almost three hundred and fifty men here with us, and every one of them has my personal promise of extra pay if they have to do any fighting. Most of them would rather fight than not. We can knock that fort, as you call it, to smithereens, can't we, Thibault? You've got some dynamite with you, haven't you?''

"Sure I have, Mr. Gregory, an' plenty of it, at that. But, all the same——"

"Well, use it; and use plenty of it, too."

Thibault turned his eyes upon Wadleigh as he replied:

"All right, sir. I'll do it—if that's the orders."

He made as if to turn away, but Wadleigh stopped him.

"Wait, Thibault," he said. "Tell us just what sort of a fort it is, and exactly what you think you are up against."

A group of two score or more of the foremen, bosses, bullies, and head fighting men of the attacking party, had come forward and gathered around them, and they pressed forward eagerly to hear what Thibault might have to say.

"It's the kind that ain't easy to git past," Thibault replied. "It's a double string of logs, head high an' more, laid one on top of another, an' filled in with dirt an' rocks an' things, between 'em, all the way across. An' what's more——"

"It won't stand up against dynamite, will it?" Gregory burst in, impatiently.

"Not if you can git the dynamite to it, it won't," was Thibault's reply.

"Well, it's your business to get the dynamite to it, isn't it?"

"Let Thibault finish with what he was telling, Mr. Gregory," Wadleigh suggested, and nodded to the man to continue.

"They've put up three strings of seven-foot barbed-wire fence outside of the fort itself, sir," Thibault informed them. "An' between them, they have zigzagged a lot more of the barbed wire.

An' then, just now, when me an' the other two of us crept up toward it, they sung out to us to keep our hands off. That's all."

"And you kept them off, eh? You're a fine lot, you are."

"Mebby, sir, you'd like to go out there yourself an' try to put a pair o' nippers onto them wires," Thibault said, grimly. "It might do for you, but it wouldn't be healthy f'r *me*. Not this evenin'."

One of the fighting bullies who had kept himself in the background until then pushed forward.

"Aw, come on!" he exclaimed. "What's eatin' you, Thibault? Let's rush 'em."

Others, who had crowded up after him, took up his cry.

"That's the talk!" somebody yelled.

"Come on, boys," another man shouted.

It was an unruly crowd.

The men who comprised it had gone there with the expectation of some sort of a scrap, and they did not care to be denied merely because of the physical cowardice of one or two. They had gone there to commence work, at good pay, and they were ready to begin.

A murmur arose among them. They pushed forward, and the murmur grew into hoarse shoutings. They crowded past their leaders, and began to move forward, at first slowly, then with more haste which finally increased to a run. They were charging upon the barricade that Thibault had only partly described.

Gregory was pleased by the demonstration, and did not seek to hide the fact that he was so. He encouraged them with nods of his head, and a thin

smile upon his thinner lips. His voice could not be heard, there were so many others to drown it out.

Ace Wadleigh stepped to one side with a shrug of his shoulders, and one of his slow, enigmatical smiles upon his face. He was satisfied, too, for he knew that it must come to a down-and-out fight in time, and he was quite willing that it should begin without delay.

Wadleigh knew the character of the men whom Gregory had engaged, and he knew also that they would not fight at their best unless they were first thoroughly enraged. A little scrap now, and a few of them hurt, or killed, would do that.

Thibault drew aside with him, shrugging, also. He had no taste for what was coming.

Like a rioting horde the mob rushed forward past their leaders, yelling as they went, and they approached to a point within a few yards of the outermost stretch of barbed wire before there was a sound from beyond the fort.

There they halted, dismayed. Their line swayed for a moment, and then was still.

Out of the darkness, directly in front of them, flashed a triple row of electric lights which threw into brilliant illumination the entire surrounding scenery, rendering everything as plainly visible as if it were midday, and at the same instant a single volley of rifle shots from the top of the barricade, bore to the attacking party a warning which brought every man among them to a standstill.

Not that a bullet was aimed at them. Not that a man was wounded or injured in any way.

The projectiles had sped harmlessly over their heads.

But the sound of that volley was sharp, emphatic, and filled with menace of what might follow it if it were unheeded.

The line halted, wavered, stood still and waited.

Directly in front of it, extending across the entire width of the rock-bound entrance to the pass, stretched the first barrier of barbed wire; and beyond that were others, as Thibault had described them.

Truly, the men who held the pass against them were prepared.

Lionel Gregory, small, weazened, thin-lipped, fox-eyed, alert, and with his fighting mettle (tried and proved many a time before that night, in other railroad fights that he had encountered) now thoroughly roused, pushed himself forward into the open space between his men and the barbed-wire barrier.

He stood within the full glow of the many lights, and he held up one hand, for silence.

"Who is it that dares to stop us at the entrance to Magician pass?" he called out, addressing the barricade of logs, and those who were hidden behind it, for as yet not one of Dan Randall's men had shown himself.

There was no answer.

Not a human voice replied to him.

Away off, from somewhere on the mountainside, the howl of a wolf sounded dismally. It was the only response he received.

He waited a moment, then wheeled about and faced his own men.

"Who among you have got nippers with which to cut these wires?" he demanded.

A dozen pairs of them were thrust forward toward him on the instant. He accepted two of them, and motioned to Wadleigh, who approached nearer to him.

"Come," he said. "Those men behind that fort will not dare to molest us."

"I'm not so sure about that," Wadleigh replied. "Still——"

"Are you afraid?"

"No."

"Come on, then. We'll take this length of the wire fence, between these two posts. You take that end of it; I'll take this one. Are you ready?" He put one of the two pairs of nippers into Wadleigh's hand. "Come on."

"Wait a moment," said Wadleigh.

"Well?"

"I don't think that they will permit us to cut the wires, Gregory."

"No? Why not? What will they do to stop us?"

"You heard those rifle shots, didn't you?"

"Yes. Good lord, man, you don't suppose that they'll dare to shoot us, do you?"

"I do—if you ask me."

"Well, I don't. If you're afraid, Wadleigh——"

"I'm not afraid. I'm only cautious."

Without further objection he turned away and strode, nippers in hand, toward the other end of the length of wire between the two posts. And, in the meantime, Lionel Gregory wheeled around in

his tracks and stretched out his hand toward the topmost wire, with the nippers opened, and ready to bite it in two.

"Stop that!" The sharp command came from the top of the log fort. "Don't touch that wire, Gregory."

The president of the Pacific & Hudson railroad company halted in his act, with the nippers almost touching the wire. He looked toward the sound of the voice. Wadleigh paused, and looked, also. Everybody looked in that direction.

The tall figure of a man whom nobody recognized because he wore a handkerchief tied over his face so that it effectually concealed his features had risen from behind the barricade, and now stood with leveled rifle in his grasp, and with the muzzle of it aimed directly at Lionel Gregory.

"Drop them nippers! Drop 'em, I say!" came the second command.

The grasp of Gregory's fingers upon the offending nippers relaxed, and they fell to the ground. He had not spent the best part of his years in the West and Northwest for nothing. He knew when to obey a command of that sort; he understood perfectly well just what it might mean not to do so.

"Drop yourn, too, Wadleigh. You won't need 'em," was the next order; and Wadleigh obeyed, as Gregory had done. "Now, about face, both of ye, an' march back to where ye came from. This ain't no pink tea party we're holdin'."

Again the two men obeyed the command.

"Oh, hell!" a voice from the throng of men behind Wadleigh and Gregory, shouted. "They wouldn't shoot. They wouldn't dast do it."

Then came jeers, and cat-calls, and lurid cursings, from among the men; and they began to grumble, and to mill, like cattle after a partial stampede.

And then the unexpected, the inevitable, the unfortunate thing, happened.

From somewhere in that crowd that had followed Wadleigh and Gregory from Magician, the sharp, quick bark of a revolver crashed upon the night air, and the solitary figure at the top of the log fort swayed for an instant, then crumpled backward into the obscurity behind it.

The first blow of the actual fight had been struck. The first blood had been shed. Perhaps the first life had been taken.

Even Wadleigh was appalled by what had happened. He had not meant that the first shot should come from his own side. He had not intended that any shot should be fired at all if the pass could be won without it.

But he stood his ground, there under the light of the electrics, although he fully expected that the very next instant would bring down a crashing volley of rifle shots from behind the fort, in which he might be the very first one to fall.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Effect of the Shot

The volley did not come.

A silence like the stillness of death reigned along that mountainside for the space of a moment or two, and then it was broken by the distant howl of the wolf that had seemed to jeer at Gregory only a short time before.

In that interval Wadleigh recovered himself; so also did Gregory. Both were brave men in the face of actual danger. Both knew that the danger was very real just then.

They turned their backs toward the fort, and to the guns they knew must be leveled at them at that instant; and it was the shrill, piping voice of old Lionel Gregory that shouted to his own hirelings:

"Back! Back, I say! Every one of you! Fall back! If there is another shot fired from this outfit, I'll see that the man who does it HANGS!"

Perhaps his voice, and the words he uttered, reached to those men who were hidden behind the fort. Possibly they did not. At all events there was no hail of bullets from beyond the barricade, and the men outside of it obeyed the command of the little man who was so great in their eyes, in all else save size.

They fell back, gradually at first, then precipitately, and they kept going until they were well beyond the rim of the hills, beyond a line that might have been drawn between the two points of the letter Y, which formed the eastern entrance to the pass.

Gregory followed after them.

Wadleigh stuck close to his side, waiting. For Ace knew how to wait, and when to wait. He much preferred to play second fiddle just then. It would be time enough for him to lead—afterward.

And he meant to lead, finally. He had intended that from the beginning. Now, more than ever, he was determined to do so.

Behind them the electric lights that had illuminated fort and wire fences, went out. Night reigned again where, but a moment before, all had been as light as day.

Not a sound, not a protest of any sort, had come from the force that guarded the entrance to the pass. The men behind the piled-up logs might as well have been dead, so far as any manifested evidence of their being alive was concerned.

Nevertheless, those men were very much alive, and it was no lack of fighting spirit that kept them quiet. Far from it.

It was the presence of their leader, on the spot, at the crucial moment, that held them, and that continued to hold them when every one, had he followed his own individual impulse, would have retaliated in kind. The comparatively peaceful scene might have resolved itself into a veritable slaughter.

Dan Randall had started down the pass from

the pulpit, at once, after the receipt of the telephone message which had warned him of the approach of the Wadleigh and Gregory forces. He had waited only just long enough to speak again to Buxton, at the western end.

"Our information is, in effect, that Taggart will fight his way inside, with powder, if he can't get in without it," he said. "But I know that you can take care of your end, Bux. I must go down to the east end. Ace and old Lionel are coming. I am giving you only these directions: Keep Taggart out. Don't let him inside. That is all."

His rugged little mountain horse took him swiftly over the course, for the electric lighting used for the night shifts made the pass almost as light as day. Still, by doing the best he could, he arrived behind the logs of the fort only just in time to hear that pistol shot, and to catch in his arms the man who was the victim of it.

He saw, too, what the others of his men could not see and had not seen, and that was that Mike Reardon—for it was he—was not killed; had not been even seriously wounded.

In fact, Mike was not so much as stunned.

The bullet had grazed the side of his head, unbalanced him, and knocked him from his perch on the topmost log, that was all; and he shook himself out of Randall's grasp almost as soon as the latter seized upon him.

"Keep the men still, Mike," Randall ordered, with rare presence of mind. "Quick. Tell them that you're all right."

Reardon did so.

He stood upon his feet, and waved his arms at

the men who were on the point of rushing forward to pour a storm of bullets upon those outside.

"Nivver touched me!" he called at them. "Wait. Faith, I done that to make 'em think they'd kilt me. See?"

They stopped. They waited. They chuckled. They laughed aloud with suppressed sounds of their mirth. Reardon turned and grinned at Randall.

"Sure, 'twas a smarrrt rap alongside av th' head that I got for it, all the same, chief," he said. "It felt more like a wallop from Ben Taggart's fist, than anything else, so it did."

Randall sprang toward one of the peep-holes between the logs, and peered outside.

"They are falling back," he said. "Order the lights switched off. We won't need them, now."

"Then there won't be anny more fightin' this night, I'm thinkin'," Reardon replied as he turned and waved one of his hands to convey the necessary order.

"No. I hardly think so. Judging from their actions, they're frightened at what has happened."

"What about the mornin', do you think?"

"There will be something doing then, I suppose. Heaven knows what."

"Harrrk a minute, Mr. Randall."

"Well?"

"Can't ye hear them drills a singin', up there in the pass?"

"Surely."

"Don't ye think that ole Lyin' Gregory can hear 'em, too?"

"Yes. I think so."

"Then him, an' that snake Wadleigh ought to know that we're keepin' busy; eh?"

"Of course. They know, now, that I have got the pass, and that I mean to hold it. They know, since they saw those lights, that I have dynamos and wires, and arcs, and incandescents in plenty, and that we are running night shifts."

"An' all that means, don't it, that they know, too, if they don't get inside here before they're much older they might as well stay out altogether? Hey?"

"You bet your life they do, Mike."

"Faith, thin, they'll be afther gittin' inside tomorrer—if they can do it."

"Very likely."

"What's doin' over at th' other end of the pass? D'ye know that?"

"Taggart is there with about two hundred, or more, of his followers."

"Aye; an' they're a bad lot. I know the kind he'd pick. Mebby Mr. Buxton is afther havin' a bad time of it, by now, chief."

"All the same, they won't get past Buxton," Randall replied, with confidence.

"Mebby not. I don't think they will, either. But there'll be some dead min over there, by now, or I don't know Ben Taggart's ways—an' I think I do."

"Wait, Mike. I'll go to the telephone, and find out what is happening."

"What's the use, sir? Let 'em alone. Mr. Buxton'll report whin it's over, an' what you don't know about it in the meantime won't hurrrrt ye. Hark, now. What's that?"

A shout, and then a second one, came to them from outslde the barricade.

"They be lookin' for a parley-voo, I reckon," Reardon said, with a grin. Apparently he had forgotten all about the blow of the bullet upon the side of his head. But he was accustomed to hard knocks and minded them not at all—unless they deprived him of the power to use his great muscles. "What are ye goin' to do about it, chief?"

"Nothing," calmly.

"Eh? Not a dommed thing?"

"Nothing at all. I'm not going to hear them. Pass the word along, Mike. I don't want a sound to go out from here. Not one, except the rattle of the drills, up in the pass. They're welcome to that sound."

"Begorra, that's good. Sure, that's a peach av an idee. Nothin', says you. Nothin', says I. Nothin', says the bunch av us. Trate 'em wid contempt, says you. Let 'em think we're asleep, says I. Faith, that's bully." Then, to the men who had drawn near, he added: "Not a sound out of ye, men. We'll give 'em all they're wantin', afther breakfast."

Again the voice came to them from the darkness outside the fort, and this time Randall recognized it. Ace Wadleigh was there, in person.

"Hello, there, inside the fort!" he called.

Then he waited, and, after a time, repeated his summons once more.

"Begorra, that'll puzzle the head off'n him, so it will," Reardon chuckled. "Mebby he'll be afther thinkin' that the bullet he shot at us killed

the hull outfit; eh? Sure, he's sayin' somethin', now. Listen."

"If you are there, Randall—and we are sure that you are—you had best answer my hail," Wadleigh called at the top of his voice, and then waited once again.

"Then listen to me," he called again, at last. "Mr. Lionel Gregory, president of the Pacific and Hudson Bay Railroad Company, is here with me. He is standing beside me now, and approves of all that I say. Do you hear me?"

No answer. Wadleigh went on yet again:

"I have made proper declarations, and filed them with the authorities, that the rights of way across Magician pass belong to the Manitoba and Juneau Railroad Company, of which I am now the president, and that they have been destroyed by fire. Also, by the authority of the board of directors of my company, vested in me at our last meeting, I have agreed, under certain conditions, to transfer all of those rights to Mr. Lionel Gregory, and others. Together, we have applied to the proper authorities to have you and your followers restrained from taking possession of Magician pass, and we have with us the regularly drawn and attested official papers, so commanding and restraining you. I shall, now, personally, force my way past these barbed-wire tangles, and attach the said papers to the logs of the barricade behind which you are concealed; which act, I am instructed, will constitute a sufficient service, which, in its turn, if disobeyed, will render you, and each of your followers, collectively and individually, OUTLAWS. Do you hear me, now?"

"Sssshhh! Don't answer," said Randall, seizing Mike Reardon's arm as the latter moved as if he were about to reply.

"Faith, I'd like to push his face in for him, so I would, chief. Brandin' *me* an outlaw, indade!"

"Keep still. He isn't through, yet."

Nor was he. After a short pause, Wadleigh continued:

"In the morning, as soon as it is light, if you have not taken heed of the authority of this Dominion, as expressed in the aforesaid papers, we shall storm the barricade you have caused to be erected, and we shall take possession of Magician pass by due authority of law, using sufficient force to do so, if found necessary. I shall now affix the aforesaid papers as I have stated."

"Sure he's long-winded enough about it," grumbled Reardon. "Do you think he'll do it?"

"Do what?" Randall asked.

"Crawl up here in the dark and tack thim papers to the forrrt?"

"I think he is quite capable of attempting it, Mike."

"What then? Will the thing worrrk?"

"No. We don't have to go outside to get the papers, do we?"

"But, ain't he the wan to go back to the others an' swear that you stepped outside to git 'em, an' that he handed thim to ye, an' that ye took 'em all right? Wouldn't he make that kind of an affydavit, as quick as he'd slit y'r wizen f'r ye, if y'r back was turned?"

"He might do that, Mike. I had not thought of that."

"Then, begorra—SAY! Thim papers ain't of no account if they don't git to *you,* are they?"

"No."

For a moment after that Reardon was silent, deep in thought over some problem that had occurred to him. Then, with a wry smile, and a sly wink, he said:

"Chief, this head av mine is hurtin' like blazes. Sure I plumb forgot it until this very minute. Will ye wait here till I come back? I have me doubts about that spalpeen's tryin' that dodge he's been talkin' about. I'll be back in a jiffy."

Dan smiled, not at all deceived by Mike Reardon's words and manner.

"Go ahead, Mike, if you want to," he said. "I'd go, myself, only, if he should happen to be there with the papers, it would amount to a service of them. But don't do anything that you'll be sorry for afterward."

"Divil a fear av that, chief," Reardon replied as he went swiftly away. "If Ace Wadleigh comes inside av thim wires, to serve thim papers, he won't have anny to serve by the time he gits here—an' he won't be goin' back again to make anny affydavit about 'em, afterward, either. You hear me."

CHAPTER XXIX

The Live Wires

Randall watched the departing figure of Reardon with a grim sort of smile in his eyes, which it was too dark for others to see, for the boss bully of the hard-rock men had not deceived his chief by that subterfuge about a pain in his head. He knew very well indeed that Big Mike intended only to go outside of the fort, and to capture, if he could do it, Wadleigh, or anybody else who might dare to approach near enough to the log barrier to tack papers against it.

Dan, however, had other secrets concerning the defences of Magician Pass that were shared only by Buxton, and his engineers. They were parts of his general system of preparedness for the building of the Janver Cut-off, for he had foreseen many difficulties, although not exactly the conditions by which he was then confronted.

He had not purchased his dynamos, and his wire, and the special boilers and the entire electric plant that was now installed in the pass, without intention to utilize their resources for offence and defence in case of attack. There are other things which a plant like that one can do than merely to supply power and light for carrying on the work. He had known before he made his purchase almost

a year before, that physical protection inside the walls of Magician pass was quite likely to be vastly important before the work was finished. Only, then, he had reckoned solely upon the animosity and venom of Lionel Gregory. It was God's mercy that he had not revealed all of these plans to Ace Wadleigh.

Gregory and the other "big fellows" he had realized from the start, would fight him—and he had known that they would fight to a finish and without mercy, as soon as they realized that he intended to build the Cut-off at all hazards. They would not hesitate to drive him out of the pass with bullets and dynamite, if there were no other means of accomplishing it. *And so, he had determined not only to get into the pass, but to stay in it after he got there.*

No sooner was Mike Reardon's back well turned than he made his own way hastily through the inclosure, and a few rods up the pass itself, to what he called the East Station, which was merely a small building of logs to inclose an office, the telephone, and an electric switchboard.

Dan was wondering, as he went onward, if Ace Wadleigh would indeed have the hardihood to attempt in person to nail the summonses, or the injunctions, or whatever the legal papers were, to the fort.

He hoped so. He hoped that it might be Wadleigh. And he had his own reasons for indulging that hope.

There were two young men in charge of the Station. They belonged in Magician, and had been selected for their present occupation, by Bux-

ton. One of them had a telephone receiver clamped fast to his head; the other was seated within reach of the several telegraph keys. Both understood the manipulations of the electric switchboard which was within their reach.

Dan looked at his watch as he entered the single room of the cabin.

He stopped in the middle of the floor with his eyes fixed upon the dial, waiting, apparently, for an estimated interval to pass.

Presently he returned the watch to his pocket, and, stepping forward quickly, moved the switch that was marked 7 on the board. Then he turned and addressed one of the young men.

"Tom," he said, to the telegraph operator, "I will take your wires for you until you return. I want you to go outside for me."

"Yes, sir," Tom replied, starting to his feet.

"Go to gate 2. Step outside, and close it after you. Tell the guard inside, not to put the bar across until you return."

"Yes, sir."

"Wait, just outside of the gate, for Reardon. You will probably hear him before you see him. If he calls out—do you know his voice?"

"Everybody knows Big Mike's voice, Mr. Randall."

"If he calls out, blow your whistle. You have yours with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"After you have blown it, so that I can hear it here, mind you, call to Reardon. Say that I want him, and whatever or whoever he has got with him. That's all, Tom. Hurry."

The young man went away on a run. Randall turned to his companion.

"Give me the reports, Philip," he said; then corrected himself. "But, no. I'll attend to those later. You may tell me if there is any news from the West Station."

"They are fighting over there, sir."

"Now? Fighting yet?"

"Yes, sir. At the last report I got, over the phone."

"How long ago was that?"

"Twenty minutes," Philip replied, glancing toward the dollar clock that hung against the wall.

"Anybody hurt?"

"Mr. Buxton got a bullet through his hat when he got on top of the fort to talk to Taggart. That is the nearest. Our men have been using blanks, as you directed. But Taggart has found that out. The last report was that Taggart was getting ready to rush things."

"All right. Tell them, over there, to use the switch, if they have not done so already. And then——"

He stopped.

The shrill blast of a whistle came to them. Dan sprang to the switchboard, and turned back No. 7 to its former position. Then he stood quite still for a moment, waiting. Presently he strode across the floor to the door of the cabin and threw it open, and in the dim light he could see a figure running toward him.

In a moment more the boy called Tom arrived, breathlessly.

"All right, Mr. Randall," he called out, as soon

as he was near enough. "Reardon is inside, now, and the gate is barred. He's got a prisoner; and" —young Tom grinned—"big Mike is fighting mad."

While Tom was talking Randall stepped swiftly back to the switchboard, and again threw in No. 7. Then he passed outside without another word.

Near the middle of the inclosure, where a single incandescent light supplied very little illumination, he could see Mike Reardon who was surrounded by nearly a score of the defenders of the fort.

Mike was swearing lustily, and picturesquely; but all the time he was holding fast to a man he had brought inside of the fort with him: his prisoner.

A glance sufficed to inform Randall that the prisoner was not Ace Wadleigh, and he was conscious of a vague regret that he was not. Randall drew backward into a deeper shadow, and called softly to a man who was passing.

"Tell Reardon not to forget his duty in regard to the papers, if there are any," he said, and the man hurried away to obey. Then Randall laughed, softly, for he could hear, quite plainly, Big Mike's reception of the instructions.

"T'ell wid him an' his orders," Mike roared out. "Faith, it's dead I am, this minute, entirely. There's a million volts av that dommed stuff inside uh me. An', look at HIM!" He pointed toward his prisoner who was writhing spasmodically upon the ground. "Sure, when I grabbed him, I got it, too. The chief might-a told me."

Randall called out to the hard-rock man:

"I'll be inside the station, Mike, when you're ready to come to me."

"I'm ready now, chief," the big fellow shouted in reply, startled because his not too respectful remarks had been overheard.

"Come along, then, and bring your man."

The others made way for Reardon. He bent forward and jerked the prisoner to his feet. Then, with force that was anything but gentle, but which was sufficiently persuasive, he led the man, unresistingly, to the cabin.

"There wa'n't no papers on him, chief. Not a paper,' Mike said, as he closed the door behind himself.

"That's a lie. I did have——" The prisoner got only that far in what he wished to say when the flat of Big Mike's hand fell across his face, and effectually closed his mouth.

"It's him that's doin' th' lyin', chief," Mike said with a grin. "Sure, I searched him through an' through, an' there wasn't a dommed paper on him. . . . Ain't that so, ye scum of the earth? Tell the chief it is, or I'll——" he raised his big fist and held it menacingly over the prisoner's head.

The captive, who was evidently nothing more than a "skinner" by occupation, and who had doubtless been selected for the work of tacking the papers against the fort because of his lack of importance, looked first at the threatening fist, then at the savage visage of Big Mike, and nodded.

"Say it," said Mike. "Don't nod it."

"I didn't have no papers," the man replied.

"Faith, that's all we want of you. What shall I do with him, chief?" Mike asked.

"Send him up the pass. Tomlinson will put him to work. You're a skinner, aren't you, my man?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'll get double pay, here. Do you want to stay and go to work on the morning shift?"

"Betcher life I do, sir."

"Do you think there are any more like you, out there, who would wish to do the same thing if they had a chance?"

"More'n half of them would, if anybody should ask you, sir. There's a whole bunch of them that would desert and come to you in a minute, if they dared, or if they had half a chance," was the quick and eager reply.

"Very good. We will try to give them an opportunity. Take him away, Mike. Send him up to Tomlinson."

Reardon reached out and rested his hand upon the door. Then he paused.

"I guess you heard what I said outside, there, a little bit ago, chief," he said, half sheepishly. "I didn't mean it. But I was mad. How the hell was I to know that you had about twenty million volts of electricity burnin' up them wires when I grabbed onto this gazabo, who couldn't let go of the wan that he was holdin' onto? Sure, I got it me ownself, t'rough him, an' I reckon they heard me yell, plumb to the Great Slave. If you'd-a told me, chief——"

"You know it now. That's enough, isn't it?"

"Mebby it is, sir. I reckon mebby that's what

you was thinkin' about, when you didn't seem to care even if Lyin' Gregory an' his bunch did try to cut them wires, under cover of the dark. Sure, they couldn't cut 'em; eh?''

''They might cut the barbed wire, Mike. That is not charged. But if one of them should put a pair of steel nippers against the charged wires—well, those wires are alive, that's all.''

''An' it's thinkin' I am, that the wans that touched thim, would be dead, at that.''

''Not quite, Mike. But they would be uncomfortable, to say the least. And they might *wish* that they were dead, for a moment. Go, now. I have work to do, here.''

CHAPTER XXX

War, to the Utmost Limit

Twenty-one days had come and gone since the night when Dan Randall sent Jules away to take the trail of Lightfoot for the recovery of the little black satchel. AND, to find out what had become of Joyce Maitland. . . . And not one word nor message of any sort had been received from Jules in all that time. Not one.

Dan's anxiety had been very great indeed although, outwardly, he had given no sign of it.

Every minute of his time had been occupied in the bringing in of his supplies and materials, in the building of the forts at the ends of the pass, in the installation of the electric system, and in the actual beginning of the work of construction.

He had slept little, and that only at intervals. Never, regularly. A few hours out of the twenty-four, and rarely more than an hour or two at a time, had been his utmost limit, and the strain was beginning to tell upon him.

He had grown haggard and spare, and weary-eyed; only, the keenness of his eyes had not diminished, nor had his wonderful grasp of detail and his almost superhuman energy, grown less.

He was everywhere on the job at all times of the day or night, and the men had grown to look for him when he was least expected.

He had established a system of premiums by which if one gang outdid another, within a specified time, it won a prize worth having. He had extended this feature even to individuals, and the consequence of it all was that never within the memory of any one of the workers had an enterprise gone forward with half the speed of the construction of the Janver Cut-off.

Nor had he neglected Yvonne, at the stone house near White Lake. She would have been left utterly alone during that time, but for old Pitou, whom Dan induced to remain with her until the return of Jules. But now, that the actual presence of the enemy upon the ground at both ends of the pass made it certain that the war had begun, Dan realized that there would be but little possibility of his going out of the pass again, until the Cut-off was completed.

The funds that were contained within the little satchel, he had not needed—because the workers in the pass preferred not to be paid off until the job was finished; and then they would want all that was coming to them, in a lump. And Dan had dared, with bravery superhuman, to go ahead without the funds to pay. His great faith in himself, his destiny, and in the future of the Cut-off had compelled him to go on.

At the end of each seven days, every man had received a due-bill of Dan's indebtedness to him and those due-bills would have to be met and cashed, in time.

Dan knew that without the satchel he could not supply the cash. And he realized that unless he had the cash ready to pay out, when the time came,

every man among that motley crew would turn upon and rend him, and all his works, and that he would stand to lose the Cut-off at the very last moment, even after he had completed the building of it. It was a great game that Dan Randall played; a great gamble.

The men never doubted his ability to pay. They preferred to receive no cash until they were through with the job, and could go where it could be spent. Money was no good to them unless there were places provided to spend it. Among the supplies stores were contained all things that any one among them might require—which Dan was willing that they should have. Liquor was tabbooed.

Thus, the recovery of the satchel and its contents, was vital.

There were other resources which Dan could command, but they were thousands of miles distant. The situation was such that they could not be drawn upon in time to benefit them.

And Joyce.

But for Dan's soul-abiding conviction and faith that she was safe and unharmed, he would have thrown the Janver Cut-off and all that it meant to him, and the black satchel and all that it contained, to the eight winds of Tophet; to Perdition.

He had infinite belief in that unrecorded sixth sense of his, of which Joyce Maitland was the mainspring. He had complete faith, too, in Jules. That faithful servitor would have been amazed indeed if he had suspected that the very life, and hope of success, and ambition for the future of M'sieu rested upon his shoulders.

And Jules Legarde had vanished.

Randall's means of getting information from the outside was perfect. It was accomplished by putting into effect one of the amazing plans that had been perfected in his mind, almost a year before. The telegraph and telephone instruments installed in Magician Pass, explained it.

Secret loops had been run into the pass from telegraph and telephone wires that approached the mountain from every side. If a message was sent from Magician to Janver, or to Allerton, or to any other point along the lines of the railroads, the loops carried that message into the little house at Devil's Pulpit, and the sounder voiced it, and the man seated at the table wrote it down in the form of a report which Dan read over at his leisure.

He knew, of course, that sooner or later, the loops would be discovered, and destroyed; but until then they would serve him.

And so, he had known of the messages between Wadleigh and Gregory, and Taggart, and others. Thus he had been kept as well posted concerning their movements, as they were informed themselves. He might have been the commander of an army, or the arbiter of an empire, with such facilities.

He had hoped against hope that some of those wires would ultimately provide him with news of Joyce, and of Jules, and of Lightfoot. But they did not.

All that he did learn in that respect was negative; but such as it was, it was also reassuring, It was merely that Taggart and Wadleigh were as

mystified concerning what had become of Lightfoot as he was; also, that it had been reported to them that Joyce Maitland had disappeared, and was supposed to have been lost in the last great storm of the season.

Dan knew, positively, better than that. So he told himself over and over again.

The place under the ledge where Lightfoot had taken her out of the canyon, and where Jules had feared that both might have been buried in the sliding snow, contained no trace of either of them, for Dan had lost no time in searching it, despite his conviction that they had escaped. His heart told him that she had escaped, and was unharmed.

Now, after three weeks, there were moments when the fears of Buxton, as expressed by him during their last interview on the subject, returned to Dan, dismayingly.

Lightfoot was a scoundrel, after all. Lightfoot was an Indian, and treacherous. Lightfoot was a thief, a murderer, and all that was bad; and now, because of his escape from the barracks at Magician, he was an outlaw. Lightfoot held Joyce Maitland in his power—a prisoner—and it was likely that he had determined not to return at all, even to Taggart, knowing that he must face imprisonment if he did so. If Lightfoot had possessed himself of the contents of the satchel, and held Joyce a prisoner in his power, what might not he dare to do?

When Mike Reardon departed from East Station, Dan read over the reports of the two operators, but found nothing of what he so eagerly hoped for. Afterward he went about giving his

orders for the morning. Then he mounted his horse and returned to the pulpit.

Up there the sounders were clicking merrily as he entered the cabin that held them. Buxton arrived from the western end of the pass, a few moments later.

"It's all over for the present, Dan," he said. "I gave them the current. I had to give them pretty nearly the full force of it before they made up their minds that they had enough. They will try dynamite, now."

"Of course. We expected that."

"You haven't read over the last reports yet, have you?"

"Not since I left the eastern end. Why?"

One of the operators passed a few sheets of paper to his chief. Dan ran them over carefully, then raised his head and smiled at Buxton.

"They're mad, aren't they?" he chuckled.

"Rather. Never mind that. Have you seen that one which refers to Joyce?"

"Yes. I have it here, in my hand."

"Taggart thinks that she is here, in the pass, with us. That's what he tells Wadleigh. And that we've got Lightfoot, too. Now, Dan——"

"Wait, Bux. We cannot do a thing, and you know that we cannot. This information is reassuring, in its way, because it tells us that they know even less about her than we do."

"But, good heaven, man! What about Lightfoot? Have you thought of him? With all that money, with all the whiskey he wants, with Joyce as his helpless prisoner?"

"Yes, Bux, I have thought of all of it," Dan re-

plied, very quietly. "Also, I have thought of Jules. I am trusting to Jules Legarde."

One of the operators turned about in his chair at that moment and passed a sheet of paper that was covered with writing to Randall. Neither he nor Buxton had paid any attention to the sounders on the table.

Dan took the intercepted message and read it rapidly. Then, as if controlling himself with a great effort, he passed the paper in silence to Buxton, and leaned back against the wall of the building with closed eyes, and firmly compressed lips that spoke all too plainly of the anguish of mind he was enduring.

Buxton read the message that had just come in, aloud. It had been sent by Taggart from Bluerock, to Wadleigh at Magician. This is what it said:

"Jules Legarde just captured here. Refuses to talk, but I will make him talk if I have to roast him. He came from toward White Lake. I have heard of a hide-out of Randall's over that way. If Jules won't tell where it is I will find it anyhow. Must be something there. The Maitland girl, maybe. Will find out. Randall has charged wires at this end, to keep us out. In the morning I shall use dynamite. Advise you to do the same at your end. At daylight I will send men up the mountain on both sides of the pass to blast away every cliff and ledge where a shot can be put in. You do the same. We can fill the pass full of stones if we use enough juice. It is war now, and I am going in to kill. No good fooling. Tell Gregory to go back to Allerton, and to forget us,

for the present. We will need him and his influence, later, to get us out of the hole we dig. I am going to blow that pass full of rocks, or blow every man that is in there out of it, one or the other, or both. Never mind the fort. Send your men up along the top of the path, both sides of it, and pile the whole line of it full of exploding dynamite. Blow Randall and his bunch out of it, or bury them in it. We will start at daylight. When will you start? Answer."

The answer came very soon after that. This is what it was:

"Taggart, Bluerock: Happened to be here when message arrived. Already decided Gregory go to Allerton. He will protect us afterward. Your plans are good. Had decided upon practically same thing over here. Will start at daylight, both sides. You are nearer Pulpit. Attack that first. Must be their headquarters. Jules has a secret place somewhere near White Lake. Yvonne must be there. Get her, too. Make both talk if you have to use extreme force to do it. Keep me informed. Make the Frenchman tell what was in that satchel. He probably got to it first. It is war, now, with no quarter asked or given. Go the limit. Wadleigh."

CHAPTER XXXI

The Dynamite Attack

None of the foregoing events had been permitted to interfere with the noisy spatter of the drills at work, the occasional roar made by the shooting of a blast, the shouting of the teamsters, or the singing clang of rail upon rail as they were deposited length by length along the line of the proposed track.

Dan had planned from the beginning, that the work of building the Cut-off should continue, as far as possible, without interruption. He doubted very much if the threatened dynamite attack would stop his "boys" in what they were doing. The prizes he had offered, and the premiums that had already been won and lost by rival groups of workers had accomplished much in pushing forward the work. It was almost phenomenal in what had already been done.

His watch told him that there would yet be somewhat more than two hours of darkness. Much may be accomplished in two hours of time. Have you ever paused to consider how much may really be done in one minute?

After the reading of the two messages Dan sat very still and silent for a time while his companions watched and waited.

If the truth be told, it was not the threatened attack from the tops of the surrounding cliffs that concerned him most; it was the peril that he knew Jules to be in at that moment; it was the awful dangers that would threaten pretty little Yvonne when the brutal Taggart should succeed in finding the stone house at White Lake; and it was more than all else his serious concern for Joyce, now that he was practically certain that Jules had returned without her. Still, the intercepted messages reported his capture as having occurred when Jules was *"coming from the direction of White Lake."*

"Did Jules return without Joyce?" Dan asked himself. "Is it not more likely that she is even now in the stone cottage with Yvonne?"

Dan was ever at his best in emergencies, and when the first stunning effect of those two messages between Taggart and Wadleigh had passed, he became at once his own cool, determined self again.

"We've got to meet those dynamiters more than half way, Bux," he exclaimed. "Come on."

At the door he paused and turned.

"Stick to your posts, boys, no matter what happens," he told the operators. Then, instead of passing outside, he stepped back into the room, and added: "Call up Rodgers, Conroy, Peters, Purcell, Miron and Queed, at their respective stations. Do it now. Tell them that we are coming—that *I* am. I want each of them to have their hoisting tackle ready for use by the time I get there. I want every man that's on the 'off shifts' awakened and pulled out and in readiness.

Have the hard-rockers armed with dynamite. We will have to use some of that. Tell the teamsters to take their whips. No guns. No firearms. Go to it, now."

Outside the house he stopped again, seizing Buxton by the arm.

"Wait a moment," he said. "Bux, I'm going to take your end of this job. I want you to take mine."

"You're the boss," was the brief response.

"All right. There's Rodgers, getting ready now. He's got the message. See that his men are properly equipped. Pick up Conroy's, and Peter's, and Purcell's outfits, as you go along. Use the hoist that is just beyond Purcell, at Station 8, and the one next below it, at Station 9. They are on opposite side of the pass. Do you get me, Bux?"

"I know. All right. I understand."

"It will take an hour to get the men to the top, after you reach the stations."

"All of that."

"Let Rodgers take charge of one side of the pass; you keep the other."

"That is precisely what I thought of doing."

"The rest of the directions I will give you, are general."

"Stop Wadleigh and his men, on both sides of the pass. That is all, isn't it?" Buxton asked.

"Practically. You will get there long before he does. He has no idea that we are informed regarding their intentions. We'll throw a surprise into them that will last them the rest of their lives."

"We'll put the fear of death into some of them, or I'm a Dutchman. But give me an idea of what I am to do, Dan."

"You'll have to be governed by circumstances, Bux; but here is what I have half planned to do, myself, down the west end of the canyon.

"That is what I want to hear."

"I'll have Miron and Queed to help me; two good men. Their outfits can be depended upon to do good work, and to obey orders, too."

"You're right, there."

"We will get to the top of the cliffs by Miron's hoist, and at Jules' short-cut. They're at opposite sides. We'll march down along the line until it begins to get light—until we think that Taggart's men may show in sight at any moment. And then we will plant a string of mines. Do you get me? A string of mines."

"Yes, Dan."

"Not too heavy ones, Bux; just heavy enough. Not too close to the cliffs, but far enough back from the pass so that the blasts won't disturb the walls of the canyon."

"I understand. I think I know the rest."

"Wait. One string of mines won't do. You'll need three or four. They may think that the first one is a bluff, intended to frighten them. Touch it off before they get close enough for anybody to get hurt. Send the whole string off one after another—staccato, so to speak—a second or two apart."

"And then——?"

"If they come on again, after the first shots—and if Wadleigh is on your side of the ravine, they

will do that—let them get a little closer before you set off the second string."

"I see. And if they keep on coming after that?"

"You will have to hurt some of them with the third one, that's all. That will stop them. So long, Bux. Good luck to you."

"Just one word more, Dan."

"Well?"

"I know why you chose my end of the pass for this work."

"Of course."

"You intend, after you have driven Taggart's men back, to go to the stone house at White Lake."

"Precisely, Buxton."

"Alone?"

"I don't know. That will depend upon circumstances. But I think so."

"You've got something else besides all this in your mind, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"The rescue of Jules from Taggart's camp?"

"Yes."

"That will be dangerous work, Dan."

"Not so very. But that is why I thought I might do it better alone."

"I was thinking, Dan——"

"Well?"

"This: That we might take a big force of our men down to the west entrance, open the gates of my fort, make a rush for it, and take Taggart's camp by force."

"And leave anywhere from twenty to a hundred dead men on the ground, as a consequence? No,

Bux, that won't do at all, only as a last effort, when everything else has failed. Go, now. There isn't any more time to spare. Don't forget one thing."

"What thing?"

"If they should capture me—if, for any reason at all I should not be able to get back here to you, you're boss."

Randall hurried away. For one instant Buxton stood quite still, looking after him. Then he wheeled about and started as hastily in the opposite direction.

And the drills still tapped, the great work went onward. Not a man who was at work on the active shift would be taken off for this adventure.

Randall found Miron, the foreman of his station, prepared for him. It was the station next below Devil's Pulpit, toward Janver. Oddly enough it was located exactly at the spot where Lightfoot had found Joyce Maitland unconscious in the snow, nearly four weeks before that night.

The men on the off-shifts had been called from their rest-houses. The remarkable thing about them was that not one of them grumbled. They understood what they had enlisted for, and they were well paid for it. One and all were ready and willing to obey Randall's orders.

There were a hundred and fifty of them. (Buxton would have nearly twice that number, but then, he was more likely to need them than Randall.) Dan divided them into two commands. One he put under Miron for the north side of the pass; the other for the south side he took charge of himself.

It did not take him long to tell them what they were expected to do, and they received the information with cheers.

He divided his personal following into three squads, placing each one under a foreman; and then the men were taken to the tops of the cliffs, and the march downward, to meet Taggart's men, was begun.

When a third of the distance had been covered, Randall ordered one of the squads to halt, showed the men where to lay their mines, and explained how he wanted them placed.

"When you get that done," he directed them, "stow yourselves away, and wait. There won't be a thing for you to do until all the rest of us have returned here, where you are now. If there is any hand-to-hand fighting to be done, which I very much doubt, it will be done right here. So you won't miss anything."

Farther down he stationed the second squad in the same manner, and with practically the same orders. And he left the greater part of the third squad there, also. He took only ten of the men with him when he started on again.

Just as dawn was beginning to break, and the gray was showing through the black, he arrived at the spot he had selected for the shooting of the first blasts.

Dan assumed that Taggart's men would be just about beginning to move, by then. It would consume half an hour or more for them to climb to that spot.

He helped with his own hands to lay the three small blasts that he had determined to send off;

three in line, fifty to sixty feet apart, at right angles with Magician's pass.

There was a steep decline just below the point he selected. When Taggart's men should begin the ascent of it Dan meant to shoot the first of his three mines.

He knew that the attacking party would be startled and frightened, and more than likely they would scatter and run for it. And, to accelerate any such condition, he added a fourth, and smaller blast to the list, by placing one stick of the dynamite beneath a large, almost round rock, that hung directly upon the edge of the brow of that sharp decline.

The firing-batteries he directed the men to carry back some distance among the trees, preferring to remain on watch, himself, to give the first alarm of the approach of the enemy; and in order that there might be no mistake, he went off to one side, and hid himself behind a rock from whence he could command the approach to the mines, as well as be in a position to signal to his own men.

Daylight grew brighter. Over in Magician, at the eastern side of the mountains, the sun was risen. A murmur of masculine voices floated up to Dan Randall's listening ears.

He bent forward to look down upon them when they should emerge from the edge of the woods into the opening at the foot of that short hill, at the top of which the mines were set and ready, and over which the round boulder with one stick under it hung suspended. He was smiling grimly while he awaited Taggart's men.

They came into view in single file. Taggart, himself led the way.

At the foot of the short hill Taggart halted, and waited for his men to come up beside him. Evidently he believed the point had been reached when he should give them their final instructions.

Nothing could have been better for Dan's purposes. There were more than a hundred of them, and they gathered around their big leader, milling like a bunch of cattle, eager to begin the work of devastation they had started out to do.

Randall watched and waited patiently until he saw signs of the end of the conference. Then he lifted his arm and gave the signal to his own men which would set off the first blasts in the war for the possession of Magician pass.

CHAPTER XXXII

Stampeding the Enemy

Taggart's men had taken not more than two steps forward when the first shot was set off.

They had started in an unformed line, without order. Every man of them carried revolvers at their hips, and each had a belt filled with cartridges.

In addition there were many who carried burlap and canvas sacks over their shoulders, which Dan knew were filled with sticks of dynamite. It is the natural weapon of the hard-rock man. He knows more about its uses than concerning any other form of attack or defense.

Knowing it so well, he also had a wholesome fear of it whenever he is not, himself, the person who is using it. And as for the "skinners" and other railroad workers—they have had the dread of it ground into them by years of battling and fighting with the regular users of it.

If you have ever heard a gun go off behind you, in the dark, when you were not expecting it, you can realize something of the effect of that first shot upon Taggart's men. If you have ever "jumped" when somebody "booed" at you from behind a door you can imagine how that bunch jumped when that first stick of dynamite was shot off.

At first they huddled together, affrighted. Then many of them started to run.

They had begun to scatter by the time the two seconds' interval had elapsed, although many still held their ground, dominated by the voice of Taggart, who was calling to them in his most brutal and commanding tones.

Then the second shot.

It was more directly in front of the startled group. The stones, and dirt, and limbs of trees, that Dan's men had piled over it when it was laid, were of a different character from the debris that had covered the first blast.

They were hurled in every direction. A shower of gravel and fragments of rock rained down upon the slope, unpleasantly close to Taggart's men. One small stone struck the foremost of the lot and knocked him down. A huge limb of a tree tipped over several others; but, apparently, without injury to any, for they sprang to their feet and began to scatter for distance and shelter. Taggart was furious. He leaped in front of them. He yelled at them, swore at them, and he did not hesitate to use his big fists in his effort to quell the threatened stampede. Then came the third shot—and with barely an interval to succeed it, the single stick that had been laid under the boulder that stood at the summit of the steep slope, was shot. It was directly in front of the terrified men.

It was not powerful enough to rend the rock under which it had been placed, but it lifted the boulder several inches from its resting place and sent it careening down the slope of the hill, directly toward the now thoroughly frightened and panic-stricken men.

Even Taggart could not hold them then.

Even he had begun to feel, by that time, that the locality was decidedly unhealthy. Besides, the big rock was rolling down the hill, and gaining momentum with every turn it made. The men broke and ran. Taggart, perforce, followed them. There was nothing else for him to do.

They ran toward the direction from whence they had come—and at that instant there came a succession of three booming reports from the cliffs at the opposite side of the canyon.

Boss Miron was beginning to get in his work.

Added to that, one of Dan's men mischievously set off another single stick—and after it there followed two more thunderous reports from the opposite side of the ravine.

Panic? Taggart could not have stayed his men, then, had he tried; and he did not try. He proved himself to be quite as good a sprinter as any of them, for a short distance at least.

Dan Randall, watching them, laughed quietly. He knew that but few of these men could ever be induced to return; and he knew, also, that there would henceforth be little occasion to fear a renewal of that form of campaign. Taggart's bullies would still fight, no doubt, in the open, and face to face with visible foes. Nobody was better acquainted with the general character of those men than Dan Randall.

As soon as he saw the last one disappear among the trees toward their camp, he rejoined his own men and found them slapping one another on the backs, slapping their own thighs in glee, cheering among themselves in suppressed voices, laughing, all of them.

It had been a rout. . . . Nobody had been hurt.

Across the canyon, where Miron had been sent to meet the other half of the attacking party, the result had evidently been the same, for Miron's men were cheering.

Dan held up his hand and called his men around him.

"That was splendid," he said. "We sent them backward on the run, and without injuring a man among them. That is as it should be. Remember, I will not have any bloodshed, or casualties, unless it is utterly unavoidable; only, we will not give up the pass, even if it has to come to that.

"Three cheers for Big Chief Randall!" one of the men called out.

"No," Dan interrupted. "We haven't time for that. There is no occasion for it, either. If there are any cheers to be given, they should be for every man among you. But there is no need for cheers."

"Right you are, sir," the same voice called out again.

"But, there is need for watchfulness; now, more than ever," Dan went on. "Some of those men will return. Taggart will send a few of the bravest of them back again. He will try to accomplish by stealth and craft what he just now failed to do. He must be prevented."

"Sure." "You bet," etc., etc.

"He will send out scouts. They will doubtless come singly, or in twos, and threes. They will try to throw explosives into the pass, from the tops of the cliffs. They will try to kill now. I want you to go back to the other squads. I'll put Mc-

Tavish in command, for I am going in the other direction, and I prefer to go alone. Mac, step out to the front."

"Ay, sir."

"Select twenty men out of the whole outfit when you get back to the others. Put them at the next battery. Stay there yourself, in command. Keep carefully on the watch for scouts from Taggart's camp. Understand?"

"I do, sir."

"If there is another attack, or the threat of one, meet it precisely as we met this one. Will you do that?"

"I will, sir."

"Can I depend upon all of you to obey Mac, and to do as I say?" he demanded of the others.

The shout that went up in reply to his question was sufficient answer to it. He needed no other assurance.

"I have a duty to perform which I must do alone," he told them, then. "I can work better, and accomplish more, unaided. While I am away —which will be only a few hours at most, I believe —Mr. Buxton is your boss."

He waved his hand toward them and turned away; and they stood and watched him as he swung down the side of the mountain, bearing toward the south. If they wondered whither he was bound there was not one among them who asked the question of another.

Possibly each one had his own ideas as to Randall's destination—based upon what that particular individual might have undertaken to do himself, if he were boss.

Dan Randall was bound for the stone house at White Lake, where, with every moment that passed, little Yvonne might be compelled to face the deadliest of perils for any woman; where it was quite possible that he might find Joyce Maitland.

After that, he meant to rescue Jules Legarde.

That was why Dan Randall went away alone.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Taggart's Villainous Scheme

Taggart was furious when his men were routed in that manner.

Before they had gone a hundred yards down the hill toward his headquarters he began calling to them, cursing at them, and using every effort in his power to stay the tide of the stampede, but they had covered almost a mile before they began to lag and bunch together, and finally came to a stop.

Even then there were many of them who went onward, determined that if they were to listen to any talking, it would be after they had got back to camp.

Taggart could not prevail upon any of them to return to the attack.

They had had enough, and they said so, plainly, and Taggart saw, presently, that it was no use to urge. He gave it up.

"There's one thing plain," he told them. "There's a traitor among you, somewhere. I ain't makin' any guesses, because I don't know who it is. But some day I'll find out, and if it's to-morrow, or a year from now, I'll deal with that man myself; and I'll break every bone in his body, and then some. You hear me!"

Cuthbert and Crosby, at the camp, were in-

formed of what had happened by the men who arrived first—informed, too, that the same thing had happened at the opposite end of the pass. They met Taggart half a mile outside of their camp.

"Crosby," Taggart said, "I want you to stay here and take charge of things. And I want you, Cuthbert, to go with me to White Lake. We'll take that Frenchman with us." He wheeled upon one of his bullies, and added: "Triton, go and get Jules Legarde, and bring him here to me. Take the lashings off of his feet, but leave them on his wrists, just as they are. Be quick about it, too."

"What are you going to do at White Lake?" Crosby demanded. "It seems to me that the place to stay, and get busy, is here."

"You shut your trap, Orme. I know what I'm about," was the hot retort.

"What the hell do you want to go to White Lake for?" Cuthbert demanded, in his turn. "Can't you see that——"

"You shut your trap, too, Cuthbert, or I'll shut it for you," Taggart interrupted, savagely. "I ain't in no mood for dilly-dallyin', just now. Any fool could tell that there's something doin' over White Lake way. Didn't Jules come from that direction when we nabbed him? Ain't Lightfoot disappeared, and didn't I send him over the mountain after Jules the mornin' after the last storm? And so, ain't it likely that the Frenchman got him?"

"Well, what if he did?"

"He got the satchel, too, didn't he?"

"Maybe. But what has the satchel got to do with this job?"

Taggart bent forward and shook his huge fist in Cuthbert's face.

"I'll tell you what it's got to do with it, if you're too big a damfool to see it," he replied, tensely. "It's got this to do with it: It's *my* belief that that little black satchel was crammed full of money. That's what?"

Both men stared.

"Who, among the lot of us, has any idea who Randall really is?" Taggart went on, grinding the words out in half suppressed fury; and answered the question himself. "Not one of us. But this we do know. We know that he came here, and took hold of the M. & J., when it didn't have a leg to stand on. We know that he found the money, somewhere, to do it with. We don't know where he did find it, but we know that he *got* it. Well, wherever he got that, he could get more, couldn't he?"

"Possibly," said Cuthbert, who was skeptical about money matters, always—until he saw the color of it.

"Look here, *you!*" Taggart continued. "I've been sendin' out scouts to git facts, ever since Randall begun this last play of his. Do you know what he had piled up in them places where we thought he'd only gathered the material for this spring's repairs? Ain't ye seen enough to tell you that? *He had all the material he needed to build this Cut-off, you infernal idiots.*"

"Of course we know that——now," said Crosby, mildly.

"Oh! You know it now, do you? Well, how'd he get all them men away from us, to work in the

pass? How'd he git 'em away from old Gregory? How'd he git 'em away from the B. S. & L. S.? *With money!* There wasn't no other way to git 'em, was there? It's money that talks in this country."

"Of course. But all the same——"

"Aw, shut up. What did he come back to Janver from Carrolton for, through that storm before the last one, an' bring that bag, if it didn't have the cash inside of it to make his first payments to the men he intended to hire."

Cuthbert nodded.

"That's where we made our big mistake," he said. "If we had waited, and not sprung that business on him so soon, he'd have given the whole snap away to us, that day of the meeting."

"Sure, he would. He thought we was with him, then," Taggart replied, mollified. "I have been puttin' two an' two together, Cuthbert. You can bet on it that that black satchel was crammed full of money—to the limit. And you can bet that Randall intended to use that money to get the men to build the pass. And you can bet on one more thing, too."

"What?"

"That there ain't been any chance to get any more money from anywhere, since he brought that bag into Janver. That's what."

"Well?"

"Well? . . . *Well? Well?* You jackass! Don't you see that if Randall ain't got the black bag, he ain't got the cash? And if he ain't got the cash, he can't pay off the men? And that if he can't pay off the men, they'll turn on him like so many

wolves, and tear him apart? And don't you see that if we can keep him from gettin' that money, the hull damned Cut-off is goin' to drop right down into our laps?"

Both men nodded, wisely. They saw the point.

"You just let me get my paws onto that black satchel, an' what's inside of it, an' I'll set right down here on my hindquarters, an' wait for Randall to finish the job," Taggart finished, with a wide grin. "He'll be workin' for us, all of the time; that's what he'll be doin'."

"Well, how are you going to get your hands on it?" Crosby inquired, visibly affected by what he had heard.

"You want-a know?" Taggart asked.

"Yes."

"I'm goin' to take the Frenchman over to White Lake. I'm goin' to make him tell me where he hid that satchel. If I can't make *him* tell me, I'll make his *wife* tell me—or, *I'll make his wife make him tell me.* See?"

"I guess so," Cuthbert replied, with a half shudder.

"If I can't torture *him* into givin' up what he knows, I know a way, *through her,* that'll make him open his mouth so wide you could drop the whole dictionary between his jaws. You hear *me!* She 's a purty little thing, too—at that. . . . Here comes Triton, with Jules. Cuthbert, you call to that hellion of yours, an' tell him to come along with us. He's about the cut of cloth that we want along with us for a job of this sort. We'll know more'n we do now, when we git back, or my name ain't Taggart."

CHAPTER XXXIV

At the Stone House

Randall had about the same distance to travel to get to the stone house at White Lake as the others, but the way was much more difficult. On the other hand he had a little advantage over them in that he knew the exact location of the cottage, while they did not.

But, in the "hellion" of Cuthbert's, to whom Taggart had referred so graphically, they had a trailer from the North who could follow a track where none was visible to other eyes. He was called Duprez, and if his character was as villainous as his countenance, nothing more need be said. Common report had it that he was even worse.

So, in that party there were Taggart, Cuthbert, Triton, Duprez the hellion, and Jules—dear old Jules with his wrists tied together behind his back, with bruises upon his face where he had been roughly handled at the time of his capture, and with the muscles and joints of his legs stiff and sore and unwieldy from the bonds that had confined them since he was taken prisoner.

But Jules' spirit was as strong as ever. Outwardly he was the same as if nothing had happened to him. He made no comment, offered no protest, said nothing, when he was hustled forward by the others.

The hellion took the lead after they had gone a little distance. He was attempting to follow the black trail of Jules, made at the time of his capture; and, until they arrived at a certain point, which, as it happened, was about an equal distance from the lake, if they kept on straight ahead, and from the stone house if they turned off to the left, Duprez made no difficulty of it.

There they came to a stop.

"Which way, now?" Taggart demanded of Jules.

Jules made no reply, and Taggart struck him with his fist, and knocked him down; he remained so until they went to him and stood him on his feet again. Then he merely shrugged his wide shoulders, disdaining to speak at all.

He knew that he was utterly helpless; but all the same he did not intend to guide these men to the stone house, and to Yvonne. Not he.

But, also, he had no doubt of the ability of Duprez to find the trail, and follow it, if he made the attempt. And after a moment the hellion did make the effort.

It happened that old Pitou had been out that way the preceding evening, seeking for a trace of Jules. The old man had not been over careful to conceal his trail, and it was that which Duprez discovered presently.

He signalled to the others, and they started on again, going, this time, directly toward the place they sought.

One might have passed within a few rods of the stone house without suspecting its presence, so deftly had it been hidden away beside the moun-

tain by the unknown pioneer who had built it so long ago that it as well as its builder had been forgotten.

Only the front of it showed, even when one was close to it; the front, and a small section of one side. The rest of it extended back into the mountain itself, formed by a spacious cavern which the builder had probably blasted out for his uses.

But these men found it. The trail of old Pitou led them directly to it.

It was hidden behind a thick growth of trees, and a small clearing had to be crossed before one arrived at the porch, and entrance.

Yvonne was standing just in front of the porch, looking directly toward them, when they came out of the wood into view.

She knew Taggart, of course, and Cuthbert, and the other two as well—and she saw Jules, and realized in that one quick glance that he was bound and a prisoner.

They were still a dozen rods or more away from her, and after that one swift glance toward them, she turned and fled into the house.

Taggart and the others saw her.

Taggart yelled at her as he started to run toward her; the others came to a halt and waited.

There were two doors and two windows to the house; and—well, they had all been constructed for the purpose of keeping people on the outside.

Yvonne lost no time in closing the inside doors that were made of heavy planks of oak, bolted one upon another, and supplied with bars as heavy to hold them shut. The windows were the same. Nothing short of dynamite could open them from

the outside. Fire would not burn them, and the house itself was made of rough, unhewn rocks. But for the windows and doors and the little porch, the house might have looked to be a part of the mountain.

Taggart came to a halt a dozen feet away. Then he turned and called to the others. When they had joined him, he turned again, and called aloud.

"Hello, there!" he said. "Come out of that."

He started backward when a voice replied to him from some place that was seemingly over his head. And looking up he could not discover where it came from—unless it was shouted at him through a small hole in the cliff, above and behind the house-front.

"What do you want?" the voice demanded.

It was the voice of a man, too, and Taggart glanced toward his companions uneasily; but Triton grinned at him, and said:

"Dat ees old Pitou spikin', m'sieu. Heem dere weeth Yvonne, mabby."

Taggart faced toward the house again.

"We want you to come out here," he said, savagely. "If you don't do it, we'll find a way to bring you out. You get back, away from that hole, Pitou, or I'll send a bullet into it. Tell Yvonne that I want to talk to her. Tell her it's Taggart that's talkin'."

"What for you come here, m'sieu Taggart?" the voice of Yvonne called out, after a moment of silence, although nothing of her face could be seen.

"Can't you see that we've brought Jules back to you, Yvonne?" Taggart replied, and grinned when he said it.

"He did not want to come, else he not be tied up," she said, in return.

"Ask him whether he wanted to come or not," Taggart announced.

"No, m'sieu Taggart. I talk weeth you, now; not weeth Jules. Untie him, and then I will talk weeth him. Those streengs, they bind his tongue just' sam' as they bind his wreests. For sure, m'sieu."

"Oh. They do, do they?" Taggart half turned and struck Jules in the face with the flat of his big hand. "Maybe that'll loosen his tongue," he said.

Jules did not so much as wince under the blow. He had expected something of the sort and was prepared for it. The voice of Yvonne came to them through the hole in the cliff, sharply and clearly.

"M'sieu Taggart, if you do that once more, I, Yvonne, will shoot you dead where you stan'," she said; and she uttered the words without excitement, coolly, implacably.

Taggart's reply was a shot from his own revolver which he pulled from his belt and fired without taking aim. He did not even try to send the bullet through the hole, for he had no idea of injuring pretty Yvonne in that manner.

"That will give you an idea of what I will do, Yvonne, unless you come out here, as I order you to do," he called out to her—and received no reply. Dead silence was the only answer he got.

He waited a moment, and then called again to her; and still received no response.

"Triton," he ordered, "you leg it back to the

camp, and fetch some dynamite. That will let us in, if it won't bring them out. We'll see. G'wan. Run!''

It was just at that moment when Triton started away to obey the last order that Dan Randall arrived upon the scene.

He overheard Taggart's last order, too.

CHAPTER XXXV

Dan Randall's Strategy

Dan had arrived from across the hills. He had come straight through the woods floundering through some of the drifts of snow which still remained unmelted under the trees.

But, in order to approach the house he had been obliged to make a short detour, and the consequence was that he came up directly behind the men who had already arrived. He was, in fact, only a few paces back from the spot where Yvonne from the door, had first discovered Taggart and his companions.

So, Triton was obliged to go past Dan Randall when he started to do his master's bidding. And Triton had been ordered to fetch dynamite.

Dan managed to move back a few paces before Triton started, and thus he put more trees and other obstacles between himself and the clearing in front of the house.

He had to wait but a moment after that before Triton came up to him; Triton, with his elbows close to his sides and his head hunched down between his shoulders and his body bent slightly forward in the characteristic position for swift running.

Triton had no idea of an obstacle in his path

until Dan rose upon before him. Dan might have tripped and thrown the man easily, but Triton would have bellowed out, and if that were to happen, Taggart would be warned.

So Dan merely stepped directly in front of the running man at the proper moment, holding a leveled revolver in his right hand, with a muzzle pointing at that part of Triton's body which Triton loved the most—his stomach.

Triton stopped.

"Don't speak, or make a sound," said Dan.

Triton did not.

"March," said Dan, "in exactly the same direction you were going."

Triton marched. He did it without comment. He understood what the muzzle of the gun that was pointing at him might mean, and he knew the man who held that gun.

Dan, on his part, realized that there was no occasion for haste. Taggart would not attempt any urther move at the house until the return of Triton with the explosive, and at the very best it would have taken Triton a full half hour to go to the camp and return.

So Dan marched his prisoner into the woods, directing him by a devious pathway that he knew well, and stopped him, presently, near a place where cord wood had been piled and left to season.

There Dan disarmed and bound the man, using Triton's own belt, which he cut in twain, lengthwise, for the purpose; using, also, some leather thongs which he found in Triton's pouch, and which had been originally intended to repair snowshoes. He gagged Triton with Triton's necker-

chief, which, until then, had been of little use save as an ornament.

When he had finished Triton was as helpless as a tortoise on its back. We have already discovered that Dan Randall was in the habit of doing things thoroughly.

"Now, Triton," he said; "perhaps I'll come back after you; possibly I may not. If your friends should happen to kill me, I won't be able to do so. If I don't, you'll probably rot here. But the chances are that I will return."

Triton remained stolidly indifferent, after the manner of his kind, and Dan turned his back on the man and went away.

He sought the same place where he had surprised Triton, concealed himself as well as he could behind the trunks of three trees that had grown up closely together, and waited.

He knew that after a time, when Triton had been gone long enough, Taggart would become impatient; and Dan hoped that Cuthbert, or Duprez might be sent out to look for him.

"If that happens," he murmured, answering his own thought, "it will reduce their forces to two. I shouldn't wonder if——" he stopped there; but he smiled to himself; a little wistful smile of anticipation.

Waiting was never Randall's long suit, but he could wait, as well as act, when occasion required it.

He could also see, by bending forward, and peering through the trees toward the clearing.

Taggart was pacing impatiently up and down in front of Cuthbert, who had seated himself upon a

convenient stump. Jules had been ordered to squat upon the ground, and evidently realizing that there was no present hope of escape was gazing stolidly toward the house, behind the walls of which he knew that Yvonne was safe, as yet. And Jules had infinite faith in his belief that nothing very terrible could happen to Yvonne.

Taggart made no effort to question Jules. He knew that it would be useless. He thoroughly understood that the only way in which Jules could be made to talk, if at all, would be to threaten Yvonne with some awful consequences, in Jules' presence.

Cuthbert and Taggart talked together while they waited. Duprez smoked his pipe in silence, near them, purposely blowing the smoke in Jules' face at times, knowing that the latter would give much for a smoke himself.

Taggart looked at his watch frequently as the time approached for the return of Triton. He grumbled profanely each time he looked at the dial and the profanity became more profuse, and eloquent of his temper, as the time passed.

At last he closed it with a snap.

"I'd like to know what in——Say, you! Duprez! Chase yourself back there a ways, an' see if you can find that other hellion," he interrupted himself. "I suppose the fool thought that I wanted a ton of the stuff, and is trying to bring it all at once," he added to Cuthbert, when Duprez started to obey.

Cuthbert nodded as if he thought that that might be the explanation. They both turned to watch after Duprez, as he departed.

Dan Randall kept himself down, out of sight behind the trees, in the meantime.

He knew that he had quite a different character to deal with in Duprez than Triton had proved to be. Duprez was as big as Taggart; one might have said, if one had not taken measurements, that he was as big as Randall. He was called the toughest Frenchman in that section of the Northwest, and that was saying a lot.

Randall was not at all sure that the "hellion" would pass his hiding place without discovering him; but he did; and Dan, perceiving that the others had turned towards the house again, followed swiftly and silently after him.

A hundred yards further on they passed out of sight from the vicinity of the stone house.

A small, round stone, the size of a walnut, caught Dan's eye, directly in the path in front of him. He picked it up. With unerring aim—the result of long practice in the pitcher's box at college not so very long ago—he threw it.

The stone was too small to do effective work upon such a head as Duprez', and the fellow still wore his fur hood pulled down over his bull-cranium. Otherwise, he might have been stunned, for the stone struck him solidly, in the middle of the back of his head.

As it was, it knocked him down, sprawling upon his face; for he had been running with his body bent forward, and with elbows close to his sides.

When Dan threw the stone, he ran forward with all the speed he could muster.

Duprez, sprawling and startled, heard Dan running behind him, and bounded to his feet like a

rubber ball. He turned at the same time, but Dan was upon him, and took a flying leap at him as they came together.

The force of the impact was considerable, and Duprez was by no means an impassable barrier. The two went down together, Dan on top; but as they fell, Duprez let out the first half of one wild yell of warning. The second half of it was stopped by the grasp of Randall's right hand at his throat.

Dan's left hand did the rest of what was needed —or rather, the fist of it did so. It put Duprez to sleep, as the saying goes in sporting circles.

But that outcry, or the section of it that had found utterance, reached the ears of Taggart and Cuthbert. . . . Likewise, Jules heard it; only Jules did not appear to do so. He was still gazing toward the house, beyond the walls of which Yvonne was awaiting him, and if you had been watching him closely, you would have seen him nod his head slightly, at times, as if he saw something or somebody there who would understand him.

Taggart and Cuthbert both turned to face the woods when they heard the cry.

Jules gathered his feet under him by bringing them together in an odd, cross-legged shape.

The two men bent forward to listen. No second sound came to them, and the first cry had not been intelligible.

"Stay here an' watch the breed, El," Taggart ordered. "I'll see what's up."

He started away as he spoke. Cuthbert watched him—and his back was turned, for the moment, toward Jules.

Jules lifted himself to his feet without a sound, and just then the door of the house fell ajar ever so little. But it was enough so that Jules saw it.

One, two, three quick steps forward he took, as softly as the tread of a panther. Then he ran—ran like a scared rabbit, and dove forward through the doorway that Yvonne was holding open for him, just as Cuthbert wheeled, pulled his gun, and fired.

Then the door banged shut again, and Ellery Cuthbert stood there, alone.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A Double-Headed Fight

Taggart heard the shot and turned back before he came in sight of Randall. Dan heard it, also, and his first thought was that Jules, having heard the cry, had made an effort to escape, and had been shot down.

He threw caution to the winds, then, and rushed forward toward the house. All the latent fury within him was roused at the thought that Jules had probably been murdered.

Taggart was running, too, back toward the house, for Cuthbert, after firing that shot, was calling loudly to him to return.

The noise made by his own feet in running, and the continued shouting of Cuthbert, prevented Taggart from hearing the approach of Randall, who, nevertheless, gained rapidly.

Dan overtook him just as he leaped into the clearing in front of the house.

It was then that Taggart heard him, and turned; but as he made the turn, Randall fell upon him, and they went to the ground together, with Taggart making frantic efforts to reach his gun and pull it, and with Dan clinging to him and holding his arms so that he could not do so.

At the same instant Cuthbert darted toward

them. He had seen, and had taken in at a glance, the meaning of all that had happened—or thought he had; and he was not so far wrong, at that.

He ran toward them, gun in hand, prepared to kill, for Cuthbert was as dangerous as any man in that wild country when he chose to be so. He was the sort who would not hesitate to approach the two men who struggled together on the ground, and by putting the muzzle of his revolver against Dan Randall's head, blow out his brains.

That was, in fact, precisely what he intended to do.

But the house door opened a second time, at exactly the same instant that Cuthbert turned his back upon it, and when Randall and Taggart rolled upon the ground together.

Jules darted out of it.

Jules, unwounded; bruised, and sore, and stiff, perhaps, from all that he had been forced to endure; but with all the fury of a she-lynx in defense of its young.

Yvonne had cut the thongs that bound his wrists together behind his back, while he peered through the peep-hole in the heavy door to discover what was happening outside and so Jules saw his beloved m'sieu.

Old Pitou, standing just inside the door when Cuthbert fired the shot, had crumpled upon the floor, like a wet dish-rag. He had received the bullet intended for Jules, but there was no time to stop for that, then.

Cuthbert did not know that the door had opened a second time, and that Jules had rushed out from it, again.

He did not know that with every stride he took, Jules gained upon him in the ratio of two to one.

There was fury in Cuthbert's heart, and fire in his brain, and murderous lust in his soul by the time he reached the two struggling men on the ground, and stretched out his weaponed hand to deal death to Randall.

But the two men were struggling mightily, and it was difficult for Cuthbert to make sure of his aim, even at that close range—and so, just at the instant when he believed that he might be certain of it, and was about to pull the trigger, Jules struck up his arm. The gun was knocked from his hand, and the fingers of both of Jules' hands were at his throat.

Thus, a double battle, portentous and terrible, was on.

Cuthbert fought with all his strength. He struck with his fists, scratched with his nails, tried to bite with his teeth—and grew blacker in the face all the time, for, in spite of it all, not once did Jules relax the hold of those ten fingers upon Cuthbert's throat.

And Cuthbert withered under the awful strain of it; then wilted; then relaxed; then succumbed entirely, and laid quite still while Jules reached out for the pistol that had been dropped, and rapped him on the head with the butt of it, to keep him so.

In the meantime, Dan tore himself by main strength from the grasp of Taggart's mighty arms; and he did it by grasping the ex-lumberman's thick hair in his fingers and pulling the head farther and

farther backward until Taggart was obliged to release his own hold or have his neck broken.

And the moment he did release that hold he was lost.

All of the mighty strength that Dan Randall possessed seemed to center in his arms as he bent forward and seized Taggart around the body, lifting him from his feet, and threw him down upon the ground with a crashing force that was irresistible.

Taggart groaned, and made an effort to raise himself; and then, as Dan took a step forward to administer a second dose of the same medicine, he closed his eyes and fell back again, senseless and inert.

"Tie them up, Jules," Dan ordered, a bit breathlessly, for Taggart had been no easy mark to handle. "We'll carry them inside the house, presently. They will be the best guards we could have —for keeping their outfit from blowing up the place with dynamite. In the meantime I'll go and bring in Duprez. He is——"

He stopped.

Something touched one of his hands.

He turned quickly to find that it was Yvonne's lips. She had fallen upon her knees beside him and was kissing the back of his hand.

"Oh, m'sieu! M'sieu! I am so glad," she murmured.

He lifted her to her feet, and then bent forward and brushed her forehead with his lips.

"So am I, little one," he said briskly. "There now. Help Jules with these men. I shouldn't wonder if Taggart is out of business, Jules," he

added. "Men like him don't faint like that, unless something is busted inside of them. I'll go now, and bring in Duprez. Later, we'll get Triton. I got him, too. He's tied up out here, a little ways."

He was turning away again, when Yvonne stopped him a second time.

"M'sieu!" she said, and there was a piteous, beseeching expression in her eyes.

"Well, little one?" he replied, stopping.

"Tell me of the mademoiselle. Please, m'sieu. Where is she?"

Randall started—then mentally gripped himself. He had been so certain that Joyce would be there.

"Joyce? Is she not here with you? I hoped—I hoped that she was here. Yes, I did hope it."

"Non, non, non, she is not here, m'sieu. An' Jules, he not know where she is."

"Jules does not know? Jules, is that true? Where is she?"

Jules raised his eyes slowly to his master's face.

"Je ne sais pas," he replied, simply.

"You did not find her? You got no trace of her?"

"Non, m'sieu. I not fin' ma'm'selle. I not fin' Lightfoot. I not fin' the sachet. I not do notting at all. Jules, heem no good, m'sieu. Jules, heem git ol'. Heem back number. Heem better off dead. Non? Ne c'est pas?"

CHAPTER XXXVII

Taking the Bull by the Horns

Dan turned away.

The information—or rather the lack of it—coming as it did, was almost more than he could bear. He had been so positive that the presence of Jules as a captive in Taggart's hands, caught while "coming from the direction of White Lake," meant that Joyce had been found, and had been taken to the stone house to be cared for by Yvonne.

For the first time during all those strenuous days that had come and gone, Dan began to doubt that inner assurance which he called his sixth sense. For the first time since the disappearance of Joyce he wondered if she were indeed alive—and safe.

Jules had not found her; he had not found Lightfoot; he had not found the little black satchel. Where, then, was Joyce?

Lightfoot, of course, had taken the satchel from the railroad office; there was no doubt of that—that it had been he who struck Jules down in the dark, and stole it.

Had Lightfoot discovered what the satchel contained? Surely. There could be no doubt of that. Had the Indian, dazed by the sudden possession of so much money—more than he would have been able to count, or to value—made up his mind to

keep it, to desert Taggart, and to steal Joyce, too?

These thoughts shot through his brain while he hurried along toward the place where he had struck the blow that had knocked out Duprez.

Duprez, the hellion, should have been there still, senseless; but he was not. Dan shrugged, and considered for a moment. Duprez had come to, quickly after receiving the blow, and had made off the moment he was able to do so.

Randall hurried onward toward the woodpile where he had left Triton, bound and gagged.

But Triton had also disappeared. The bonds that had held him, severed by the sharp blade of a knife, were there. Triton, himself, could not have cut them, therefore Duprez had come upon him, had liberated him, and the two had made off together.

Dan did not care. He was rather pleased than otherwise. They would take the news back to their camp, of the capture of Taggart and Cuthbert.

Randall hastened back again to the stone house.

Jules, aided by Yvonne, had bound the two captives, securely, and left them where they were, while he attended to Pitou. For the bullet that Cuthbert had fired at Jules had missed its mark, but it had found another target in the body of the old man who had been standing in the way of it.

Yvonne was seated on the floor inside the house, holding Pitou's head on her lap, and was stroking his forehead gently while she murmured reassurring words to him, when Dan got there. Jules was standing near, looking down upon them both, sorrow in his kind eyes.

"C'est fini, m'sieu," he said, in a low tone to his master. "Eet ees the end. Heem want spik to you, m'sieu."

Dan dropped upon one knee beside the dying man, and Pitou opened his eyes weakly and smiled up at him.

"Merci, m'sieu," the old man murmured. "Eet ees la mort, for moi. Dat bullet, heem fin' the right place. Heem not meant for Jules. I go, now—ver' queek. Le bon Dieu, Heem know best. You weel listen to one little word that Pitou have to say?"

"Yes, yes, Pitou. What is it?" Dan replied.

"Dat Lightfoot, heem tres mauvais, m'sieu. Heem ver' bad man. Non?"

"Yes, yes. What about him, Pitou?"

"Heem père, my half brothair. Heem—dat Lightfoot—what you call nephew to me. I theenk I know where heem hide away heemself. Jules heem know the place I mean. Dat ees the only place where heem can hide heemself. . . . You, Jules, bend down nearer to moi. . . . Merci. . . . You know the place. We call heem the black rock. You remember?"

"Oui, Pitou," Jules replied.

"Eet ees dere. You know. Down in the beeg hole, behin' eet. You hav' not been dere. I have ben dere many times. You go dere. You follow down that bad place behin' dat rock, an' bimeby you comme to where I theenk dat Lightfoot hide heemself. An' mabby heem hav' the ma'm'selle hide away dere, too."

After that old Pitou's talk became incoherent. Presently he lapsed into unconsciousness. Then

he died, and with his old head in Yvonne's lap, and her fingers gently stroking his brows.

Dan and Jules carried the two prisoners into the house. Both had recovered consciousness. Cuthbert was profane and abusive. Taggart was silent until they attempted to lift him from the ground. Then he cried out with pain, and fainted away again, and Randall realized that his enemy was badly hurt.

That crashing fall upon the hard ground, when Dan lifted and threw him in their struggle, had done more damage than Taggart had ever received before that. When he came to, on the cot where he had been placed, he asked for Dan.

"I'm all in, Randall," he said, rather weakly, but brusquely, none the less, and with all of his old air of bravado. "Something snapped, when you dropped me, out there. I'm all right as long as I don't try to move; but then—well, I can't move a finger without it's half killin' me, that's all."

The bonds had already been removed from his hands and feet. Dan had quickly made up his mind that Taggart was helpless—for the time being, if not permanently. His spine had been injured by the fall. The man was all but paralyzed.

Not so with Cuthbert, however.

He ramped, and raved, and swore so loudly and constantly, that Dan very quickly determined what he would do with him; but, for the present, he and Jules carried Cuthbert into one of the back rooms and left him there. Then he summoned Yvonne and Jules to him, in the presence of Taggart.

"I've got a few things to say to my people, Taggart, and I want you to hear it," he began. "I can't stay here. I must go. I must go now. They need me back there, in the pass."

He turned, then, to Jules and Yvonne.

"I shall take Cuthbert with me," he continued. "I shall leave Taggart here with you. It may be that he is faking; I don't know. If he is, Jules, and if he should make the least effort to escape, shoot him. I mean what I say. Understand?"

"Oui, m'sieu."

"And you, Taggart?"

"Oh, I understand, all right. But I'm not fakin'. That's straight. I can be just as straight as you can, when I want-a be; an' I seem to want-a be, just now."

"All right. We'll let it go at that. Out there I knocked out both Triton and Duprez. But they escaped. They have probably gone back to your camp. Before long they will bring a hundred or so of your men to this place. Those men will bring dynamite with them, to use as you intended to use it. If they do that, they won't try to blow up the house itself; they will put their charges against that front door—just as you would have done if I hadn't been here to stop you."

"I know. You're right about that, too. I wanted to get in here."

Dan turned again to Jules.

"Jules, we will move this cot, now, directly across that door. If anybody tries to blow it in, with dynamite, they'll blow Taggart to pieces when they do it. Now, Ben."

"I hear you, Dan Randall."

"It's up to you to stop your outfit from using explosives—and they cannot get in here to rescue you without it. Jules and Yvonne will remain here to take care of you—but you've got to save them, and this house, if they do. Got that?"

"Surest thing you know, Randall. I'll have Yvonne sing out to them to send somebody inside, unarmed, to see me. Jules can keep him covered while he's here. See?"

"Yes."

"I'll fix the rest of it. You can depend on that."

"If you do not, Jules will fix you, Taggart. Don't forget, that if anything happens, *you will be the first dead man.* Get me?"

"Oh, I'm on. I ain't sure but what I'm inclined to take your side of things, from this out. You look to me like a winner, Dan."

"That's kind of you, I'm sure. Only, I wouldn't have you on my side—not if you could lift your right hand and have the whole thing finished before you dropped it to your side again. Now; we have settled that much."

"Yes."

"There are two or three questions that I want to ask you, Taggart."

"Fire away."

"I haven't much confidence in your ability to tell the truth under any circumstances, but if you tell it now, you may find it greatly to your advantage, later on."

"Chuck it at me. I'll tell the truth if I say anything. A man with a busted back ain't much account, nohow."

"Do you know where Joyce Maitland is?"

"No more'n you do, Dan, an' that's God's truth."

"Do you know where Lightfoot it?"

"No more'n I know where *she* is."

"Have you seen him, or heard from him, since you sent him out of Magician to get that satchel of mine?"

"Narry a hide nor hair of him, Dan, so help me!"

"Have you any idea where he might be found?"

"No more'n you have; honest."

"You don't know what was in that bag, do you?"

"Nope. But I can guess at it. Money."

"Well, you can keep on guessing. Maybe you'll make a better one."

"I don't think so."

Dan turned away and drew his two friends after him into an adjoining room. He closed the door, carefully. Then he spoke in a low tone.

"Jules," he said, "do you know where and what the place is that old Pitou spoke about, and do you think that there is any likelihood that Lightfoot might be there? Tell me exactly what you do think about it."

"Oui. I know the place, m'sieu; an' I theenk mabby-so, what you say—dat Lightfoot ees dere."

"Where is it?"

"Up in the mountains, then down inside of 'em, ver' far. 'Bout half way between the pass, an' Rickett's canyon. Fifteen mile, mabby-so. But, heem bad place to fin'."

"Then, listen to me. If mam'selle Joyce is there, and was safe yesterday, and last week, and

for the two weeks preceding, she will still be safe for to-day and to-morrow. You wait here for me until the day after to-morrow. Then I will come here, and we will go to that place together."

Yvonne interrupted.

"But, m'sieu, in the meantime——" she began, but Randall stopped her with a gesture.

"In the meantime, little one," he said, "I shall take the war into my own hands. I am going back now to get my men together. I shall take them outside, at both ends of the pass, first one end and then the other. I am going to drive Taggart's men at this end, and Wadleigh's men at the other end, to—to what Taggart would call Hell-an-gone. I'm not going to wait any more for them to attack me; I shall do a little attacking on my own account. . . . I will be back here, day after to-morrow, if not before, so be on the lookout for me."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

When Taggart Laid Down

Dan Randall had been gone from the stone house less than an hour (having taken Ellery Cuthbert with him; Cuthbert with his hands bound behind his back, and forced to march ahead of his captor) when Taggart's men appeared in a body, in the clearing before the house. Dan had been delayed somewhat by the disposal of all that remained of poor old Pitou. Masses would have to be said for him later. The prayers of Yvonne had to suffice for the present; but no dead man could have had the beseechings of a gentler or purer soul than hers.

The men formed in front of the house, and Orme Crosby called out a summons. Jules replied from the hole in the cliff above the house-front.

He told Crosby, in his mixed dialect, but nevertheless quite plainly, what the situation was, and what would happen to Taggart if explosives were used, as Crosby threatened. The result of it was that after a parley, and some hesitation, Crosby laid aside his weapons, and entered the house himself.

Jules kept him "covered" during every moment of the time he remained.

Crosby stood beside Taggart's cot, which had

been moved against the inner side of the door, as Dan had directed.

"What's the matter with you, Ben?" he demanded.

"My back's the matter. 'Tain't broken, but it might as well be. It's busted up, somehow. Maybe I'll pull out; I don't know. I feel all right enough, if I keep still. Say, Crosby."

"Well?"

"I've been thinkin' this thing over. Mebby it's 'cause I'm helpless, an' down an' out; I dunno. Mebby if I had my feet under me, an' my two arms workin' for me, I'd be just as hell-bent for coppin' out this thing to a show-down as I ever was. I dunno. I ain't the man I was, in my heart an' head, any more'n I am in my arms an' legs. An' so I've been thinkin' that mebby we'd better lay down our hands and let Dan rake in th' pot."

"I never expected to find you a quitter, Ben," Crosby replied.

"I aint' one. But I've got sense enough to know when I'm licked."

"Maybe you're licked; but I ain't. Where's El Cuthbert?"

"He's licked, too. An' if I can read signs as well's I used to, Ace Wadleigh'll join th' down-'n-outers before he's three days older than he is now. It's up to you 'n me, to git down on our marrers, an' beg, Orme. You hear me?"

"Maybe it's up to you, but it ain't up to me. I ain't one of the beggin' kind?"

"Ain't you? Well, what have you got to stand pat on? Not a thing. Them old deeds was burned up, in Buxton's store; you know that. I had th'

others, that Gaffney made out—and I lost 'em, 'r somebody stole 'em. It's all one, so long 's they're gone. You give Randall time an' he'll find a way to prove that the pass is his'n. He ain't no damfool, Randall ain't. We was the damfools when we played him for one. I'm ready to testify f'r him, now, if it comes to a testify."

"You dam' traitor!" Crosby half shouted at him.

"Uh, huh," Taggart responded, placidly. "You can call me them things, now. You wouldn't-a been so spry about it, yesterday, mebby. But that ain't the point."

"What is the point, then?"

"The point is this, Orme: We want to save our bacon, don't we? Dan's got us flat broke if we don't lay down, an' if we don't do it *now*. I've heard our men grumblin'. They'd desert, an' go to him in a holy minute, if they had a chance, an' you know it. An' you can't hold 'em without me. I'm the only man that can hold 'em, an' I ain't goin' to try. That's flat."

"Huh! I'm more than half inclined to go back outside, right now, and put a shot of dynamite against that door, while you're behind it, you low down, sneakin'——"

"Hold on, Orme. You might a heap sight better go outside and tie yourself to a tree, an' then hire Duprez to build a fire under you, than do that. Why, if you done that, Crosby, Dan Randall would —I dunno what he *wouldn't* do to you. Go 'head an' try it if you want-a. But don't you call me any more names, 'cause if you do, I'll tell Jules to plug you. An' Jules' fingers is just itchin' to do it,

right now. . . . Turn him out, Jules, before I order you to shoot him. Maybe he'll blow up the place, but I don't think so. He ain't got sand enough. . . . Git out, Crosby. You're rotten."

"Say!" he went on, after a moment, when Crosby made no reply. "What are you fightin' for, anyhow? What are you goin' to git, if you could win? Do you suppose that old Gregory is goin' to let you an' me have a slice of this thing, once he gets his own paws clinched onto it? Not much he ain't! An' Ace Wadleigh! Where'll he be at?"

"That's what I want to know. He's no quitter. He's——"

"He's a skunk; that's what he is. If it hadn't been for him, you 'n me, 'n El Cuthbert would-a stuck to Dan. Where'll the M. & J. be when Dan gits this Cut-off to goin'? Tell me that. I wouldn't give fifteen cents f'r the hull line of it, except the Carrolton division. Take it from me, Orme, Dan Randall's got things up his sleeve that he ain't showed us yet. He's got the cards stacked an' we're the suckers, from Suckersville. You'd better hedge on this deal, while there's time."

"How?"

"How! Go out there an' march them gazaboes back to the camp. Then take a white flag in y'r paw an' go up to th' captain's office an' ask f'r a confab with Buxton. Tell him that you'n me have decided to chuck up th' sponge, an' that we'll turn our hull outfit over to Dan, an' no questions asked. Tell him to tell Dan that we'll accept any offer that Dan'll make to us. Bul-lieve *me* you'll git a heap sight better terms that way than any

other. Tell him that you'll go through the pass, an' help him to lick the tar out-a Ace, an' his bunch, an' ole Gregory, an' hisn."

"Perhaps the men won't stand for such a thing."

"Won't they? Ask em'. Put it up to 'em if you want to. Put it to a vote. You'll find that they'll go over to Dan Randall with a cheer that'll make these mountains shake. An' say!"

"Well?"

"How long do you s'pose it'll take Dan to finish that job if he has our outfit—an' mebby Ace's, too—to help it along? Why, man alive, he'll have trains runnin' over Magician pass before the season's well begun."

"But, what will *we* get out of it? You an' me, an' Cuthbert?"

"We'll git whatever Dan's inclined to give us. That much, an' no more."

"It'll be the icy fist, then."

"No, 't won't. It'll be pretty close to what we ought to have, take it from me. I know Dan Randall. He's as soft as a girl, if you touch him in the right spot."

"You mean that we must just lay down, and roll over and beg. That's what you mean, Ben?"

"That's just exactly what I do mean. We ain't got a leg to stand on; an' if we wait till Dan gits through, there won't be a piece of sod to put the leg onto if we had it. That's what. Cuthbert's out-a business; I'm out-a business; you're out-a business without us; Wadleigh is plumb out-a business without any of us to stand by him—an' there you are. Then, there's another thing. That

Gaffney job ain't any too sweet-smellin' to suit me. Them forged deeds, if they should turn up, spell stripes an' bars for some of us. . . . You give Dan Randall back the pass, an' then tell him the truth about that directors' meetin', *and the girl,* an' you'll find that you've touched that right spot I was talkin' about. What d'ye say, Orme? Is it a go?''

Crosby was silent. Then he nodded his head, slowly, three times. Then he turned about, and, without a spoken word more, passed outside.

CHAPTER XXXIX

The Last Ditch.

Jules, watching closely every move that Crosby made after he left the house, saw him call the men around him. Jules could not hear what was said, but within ten minutes after that, Crosby's men marched away again as swiftly as they had come; and there was something about the manner of their going—a certain jauntiness that had not been with them upon their arrival—which told the quick-witted Jules that they were more pleased than disappointed to go.

He so reported to Taggart; and for a few moments afterward Taggart was thoughtful. Then he called Jules to him again.

"Look here, Jules," he said. "You ain't got any too much reason to trust me, have you? You ain't liked me very sumptuous, in the past, have you?"

"Non, m'sieu," was the placid reply.

"Well, I've got a suggestion to make to you, anyhow."

"Tres-bien, m'sieu."

"I want you to light out-a here on the trail of Dan Randall. Catch him if you can. Anyhow git to the pass, an' git into it somehow—I suspect that you know how to do it all right—as quick as the Lord'll let you. See?"

"I see, m'sieu."

"But you don't feel like goin' an' leavin' Yvonne here, alone with me. I don't blame you any for feelin' that way, an' I'm comin' to that, presently."

Jules nodded, studying the man with close scrutiny.

"You heard all that was said between Crosby an' me, didn't you, Jules?"

"Oui, m'sieu."

"Well, all that I want you to do is to tell Dan Randall all that you heard, and all that you thought about it, just as soon as it can be done. See?"

"Oui, m'sieu."

"Tell him that there ain't no strings tied to it —or to me, either. Tell him that I'm just layin' down my hand an' gittin' up from the table, an' pullin' out-a the game. An' tell him that if he wants to stake me to a bank-roll, so's I can set in agin, I'm ready to accept it, an' to play accordin' to the rules that he recognizes. Have you got that much all clear in your mind, Jules?"

"Oui, m'sieu."

"Oh, don't be so dam polite. It ain't necessary. Now, as to the other thing I was goin' to say. I can't move. I'm as helpless as a baby-calf that ain't found its legs yet. But all the same, mebby you don't believe that. Mebby you think I'm puttin'-on, an' that me 'n Crosby had some sort of a secret understandin' in that confab of ourn. We didn't, but you ain't sure that we didn't. Well, I'm going to tell you how to *make* sure."

"Oui, m'sieu."

"You just tie me up, hoof an' horns, as tight as you want-a, before you go. Then you give Yvonne a gun, an' tell her to set right down there till you come back, an' if she sees the slightest thing, inside the house or out of it, that suggests to her that I ain't playin' on the level, *to shoot me.* How's that?"

Jules nodded. He turned to Yvonne, who was standing near, and she nodded, also. Her eyes had been drilling into Taggart's very soul while he was talking.

"M'sieu Taggart mean what he say," she said, soberly. "He spik the truth, now. You go, Jules. You need not tie m'sieu."

Ten seconds later Jules had left the house.

He did not overtake Dan, but he came upon Miron's men within half an hour after Dan had passed them, for, with the prisoner, Dan did not make very great speed. Miron knew Jules, and passed him on readily.

Randall and Buxton were together when Jules found them, at the pulpit. Buxton had just finished making his report concerning affairs at the east end of the pass that morning.

In effect they were about the same as the experiences that Dan had met with, only that no prisoners had been taken. Wadleigh's men had been driven back. Seven men of Wadleigh's forces had taken the opportunity to desert, and come over to Buxton and Dan; and those men reported that Wadleigh had met with an accident of some sort, but whether it was serious or not they did not know.

Their report was, however, unconfirmed. There was no telling whether it was true or not.

The one noticeable thing about conditions in the pass was that work had not been halted in the least degree. Drills were hammering, dynamos were humming, iron was ringing upon iron, just as merrily as ever.

The Janver Cut-off was going forward just as rapidly as before.

Dan listened to what Jules had to say, with incredulous amazement, at first; then with interest. And confirmation of the truth of it came almost at the moment that Jules finished.

A messenger arrived from the west end of the pass.

"Three men have come forward, down below," he told Dan." They brought a white flag, so we talked with them. One was Crosby. He says he wants to see Mr. Buxton, or you, sir, or both of you together."

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when Crosby and the two men he brought with him were admitted to the inclosure behind the fort at the west end of the pass.

Jules was stationed where he could hear all that Crosby might have to say, but where he could not be seen.

But Dan could see Jules by turning his glance from time to time during the conference, and Jules' frequent nods of his head were sufficient assurance that Crosby was telling substantially the truth.

It was nearly dark by the time that all of the

men who had gathered at the mouth of the pass, under the command of Taggart, Cuthbert and Crosby, had been signed on, and had been divided into groups and squads and gangs, at the direction of Randall, and were marched through the pass to their several stations.

So ended one phase of the fight for possession of Magician pass.

Dan knew that he would have nothing more to fear at the Janver end of it. He had the signed confession, properly witnessed, of Crosby, relative to the forged deeds, and to the part that Peter Gaffney had played in it.

But Crosby had made no mention of the name of Joyce Maitland.

Dan, from motives best understood by himself, alone, had avoided any mention of her. Jules had forgotten, or neglected, or determined not to speak of the one remark he had heard Taggart make in reference to Joyce.

Cuthbert, still a prisoner under guard, sore to the quick, ugly, resentful, and as bitter as gall, had refused to take any part in the confession, and had cursed Crosby, and Taggart, and Dan and everybody connected with the affair except Ace Wadleigh, roundly.

"Ace Wadleigh an' me, ain't through, yet!" he yelled at them. "Gregory ain't through, either. You'll see. I'll swear till I'm black in the face that that confession of Crosby's is a lie from beginnin' to end. So'll Wadleigh. So will about a hundred more of us."

Dan preferred not to argue with him, and left him; but Dan Randall knew Ace Wadleigh better,

perhaps, than any of them did, and he realized that Cuthbert had spoken the literal truth so far as he was concerned.

Ace was not one to give up. He would fight to the last ditch. The contest for the possession of the pass was not over, yet. Dan realized that.

His decision in that regard was confirmed in a startling manner within thirty seconds from the time of his parting with Cuthbert.

He stepped outside of the shack where Cuthbert was confined, and closed the door of it after him. Buxton, and Crosby, and three of his foremen, were with him.

He came to a stop a few yards from the door, and parted his lips to make some remark concerning what had just occurred, when all of them were startled by the sullen roar made by a succession of explosions which came from down the pass to the east of them.

Every man there knew what it meant. There was no mistaking the sounds of it. Wadleigh was making an attack, and he was using dynamite.

Wadleigh was endeavoring to blow up the fort that guarded the eastern entrance to Magician pass. Possibly he believed that Taggart would be doing the same thing at the opposite end—or he had determined to go it alone, in any event.

Dan Randall gave his orders quickly.

"Get down there, Bux," he shouted. "Crosby, now is your opportunity to prove yourself. Stay with Buxton, and take his orders. Bux, order out every man who is not engaged on the work. No shooting! No killing or wounding, if it can be avoided. Drive Wadleigh and his men out.

Drive them into Magician, and then out of it again. Keep after them. Let this night be the finish. I'll be with you by the time you get at it."

Dan ran to the little building that he called his headquarters.

He discovered, there, that the explosions down below must have been even worse than he supposed. Neither the telephones, nor the telegraph wires, were working.

He had known by the noise of them that the shots set off were many, as well as violent. He had no doubt, now, that Wadleigh had somehow succeeded in planting his mines so that the whole front of the east fort had been destroyed.

In his dash down the pass toward the scene of the conflict he overtook and out-distanced scores of his own men who were rushing in that direction to take part in the fight.

Skinners, with their mules and whips; hard-rockers, with their hammers, sledges, and steel drills; graders, with their shovels and picks; railers, with their sledges and spikes; it looked as if every man among them had picked up the first article he could lay his hands upon to use as a weapon.

For a time they needed them, too.

It turned out afterward that Wadleigh's men had been ordered to shoot—and many of them did shoot toward the defenders of the pass, with Winchesters and revolvers; but they shot high, purposely.

It went on record, afterward, that not one man of either party was hit by a bullet that night; but the broken heads, the smashed jaws, the torn

faces, and dislocated bones and joints that resulted from that fight, short and sharp as it was, were too many to be counted definitely.

Many of the attacking party were beaten down by the hoofs of the charging mules of the skinners. Many more sustained cut and bleeding faces that were laid open, often to the bone, by the terrible whip-lashes.

There were hundreds of hand-to-hand fights; scores of impromptu wrestling matches; dozens of personal contests between respective bullies who stripped for it, and around whom rings were formed to abide by the decision of that particular fight, and to enlist their further efforts on the side of the victor of it at the end.

But the utter rout which followed, as the result of the conflict, was inevitable.

Wadleigh's men were bested at every turn.

They broke and fled in whole sections before the fight had continued twenty minutes after the arrival of the reinforcements from up the pass. In twos, and tens, and sometimes by the score, they seized upon the opportunity to go over to Dan's side, and turned about to fight against their own numbers.

Then came the stampede of those who remained loyal to Wadleigh, or who were afraid to desert him.

They were chased into the open ground below the entrance to the pass; they were pursued into the very town of Magician. Those who were overtaken were pummeled until they yelled for mercy—or until they agreed to go to work for the Janver Cut-off.

Captain Badmington, with his few men, rode out to the scene of the conflict—and arrived only in time to discover that it was over and done with.

In the beginning, Wadleigh led his hosts, and shouted encouragement to them from everywhere, seeming to be omnipresent in his capacities. It was certain that he had not been injured so that he could not fight.

At the end of it, however, Ace Wadleigh had disappeared.

Search for him as they might—and did—not a trace of him could be found; and when, at least, comparative quiet had been restored, when the men who had been fighting against each other were laughing together and retailing accounts of the deeds they had performed, or witnessed, during the mix-up, Ace Wadleigh was nowhere to be found.

There was just one sad fact connected with the whole affair.

Those first explosions, when the fort was blown up, had killed three men outright, and a dozen others had been injured more or less severely. In the fight that followed no one had been mortally injured, although there were scores who would find themselves temporarily disabled.

Where was Wadleigh?

Nobody seemed able to supply any clue about him until a big and burly Irishman shouldered his way through the knot of men who surrounded Randall, and announced:

"I dunno where he is now, sor, but the last I seed av him, he was hot-footin' it f'r the sky-line

toward th' north, an' there was a breed-Injun wid him that I hadn't seen before."

Dan wondered if the "breed-Injun" could have been Lightfoot. But he did not ask the question.

CHAPTER XL

Things That Did Not Burn

Dan Randall, with Jules beside him, rode into Magician that same night.

He went directly to the barracks, and to Captain Badmington, and laid Orme Crosby's signed and witnessed confession before that official.

Then Jules was sworn, and related all that he heard said between Taggart and Crosby, at the stone house at White Lake. And the memory of Jules, for detail, was profound.

After that, Randall took the oath himself, and told his own story, and at the end of it, Captain Badmington opened a drawer of his desk and drew forth from it two packages, wrapped in oilskins. He laid them both down on the desk in front of him.

"Mr. Randall," he said, "these two packages have been in my possession ever since the day that Sergeant Hurley arrested you and brought you here to this office. I have examined the contents of both of them."

He lifted one of them in his hands and removed the wrappings. Then he ran the documents it had contained idly through his fingers.

"This one," he continued, "you have believed was burned in the stove, in Buxton's store. In reality, when you tore it away from the possession

of Mr. Wadleigh, and threw it over your head behind you, it fell directly into the grasp of Mr. Buxton. There was a third package of this character, if you will take the trouble to recall the fact, in your own possession. It was some sort of a fake-package, I believe, that Wadleigh had made up, and had substituted for this one, before you left Janver to come here. There was such a fake-package, was there not?"

"Yes, captain."

"You had referred to it in your talk with Buxton, before your arrest. You were very cold, and worn out by your exertions, at that time. In returning it to your pocket, you missed the pocket and dropped it to the floor, without being aware of the fact. Your fingers were half frozen at the time. Buxton picked it up and laid it on the counter behind him. Do you understand me, Mr. Randall?"

"I am beginning to, captain."

"When this package here was thrown into Buxton's hands, he put it into one of his pockets. Nobody noticed the fact. You were keeping things moving at about that time, were you not?"

"I believe I was, sir." Randall smiled a little at the recollection.

"Buxton remembered the package that you had said contained nothing but waste paper. It was on the counter, within his reach. He seized it, and threw it into the fire. You know the rest of that story."

"Yes, sir. It is rather wonderful, isn't it? All this, I mean?"

"Perhaps. It was certainly fortunate for you.

Buxton is my personal friend, as possibly you know. He lost no time in telling me all the details, and in placing the old deeds in my hands. I knew, almost at once, exactly where you stood in the matter relating to Magician pass."

"Thank you, captain."

"Something else happened there, at the store, that day. It relates to this other packet."

"Yes, sir?"

"It dropped to the floor during your fight with Taggart. He dropped it. He did not know that he had done so. Neither did anybody else appear to know about it. It was seen by Sergeant Hurley, who picked it up. . . . Now, Sergeant Hurley is not usually forgetful, but he forgot all about this packet for some days after that—until he accidentally came upon it again. Then he brought it to me. It contains the forged deeds."

"Wonderful!" Dan murmured in an undertone.

"I am familiar with your signature, Mr. Randall. When I was a young man I worked in a bank and I rose to the position of paying-teller. I was considered an expert in the matter of signatures, and forgeries of signatures. I do not need these confessions of Taggart and Crosby to assure me that the signatures to these deeds are forged."

"I don't know how to express my thanks, sir, for——"

"Never mind that, Mr. Randall. Acting upon my advice, Mr. Buxton kept silent in regard to all that I have told you. I deemed it best to permit events to shape themselves somewhat more definitely before I acted in your behalf. The result has proved that I was right."

"Indeed it has, captain. You see——"

"Please let me continue, Mr. Randall."

"Certainly, captain. Excuse me."

"I did take it upon myself to have something in the nature of a warning whispered into the ear of Mr. Lionel Gregory. He has not been active in your affairs since I did that. The first attack upon you would not have occurred had I done it a few hours sooner. And, now, there is just one thing more."

"I am overwhelmed as it is," Dan replied.

"Well, this clinches matters, I believe. The records of your deeds were not destroyed that night when poor Sutherland was burned to death. Those particular books which contained them happened to be in the safe. Your title to the right of way across Magician pass seems to me to be perfectly clear, Randall. I congratulate you."

"God bless you, Captain Badmington."

"The same to you, sir, and thank you. God's blessing is the one great thing in our lives. Without it we can do little; with it, we may accomplish much. Good night, Mr. Randall. . . . But wait. What information have you concerning the whereabouts of Boniface Wadleigh?"

"None whatever, save that he escaped from us tonight, and was last seen, bound northward, along the eastern slope of the Lantowas in the company of a 'breed'-Indian who might have been Lightfoot. But that is only a guess of mine."

"Thank you. I shall issue a warrant, and a reward for his apprehension, in the morning. It was he who gave the order for the use of those explosives, in the attack of to-night, by which three

men were killed, and others were severely injured. This Dominion will not countenance such things as that. There is nothing more, I believe."

"Yes, sir; there is one thing more," Dan said, impulsively. "It is something that concerns myself, intimately. It is something that you should know, concerning me. I am not——"

The captain held up one hand, warningly, and stopped him.

"All in good time, Mr. Randall. Perhaps I know what you would speak about; possibly I do not. In any case, it can wait—and I much prefer that it should. I will say this much, however."

"Yes, sir."

"I know who Peter Gaffney was, and what he was called before he came out here. I also know why he came here—which I am sure you do not know. If your communication that you were about to make has any reference to him, or to the contents of the belt he was wearing when he was frozen to death on the mountain, I must ask you not to make it now. There will be a more appropriate time, later on. . . . And now, Mr. Randall, I will shake hands with you, and bid you good night."

Dan Randall stood very still for ten minutes after the captain had gone. Jules and Sergeant Hurley remained in the room, waiting in silence. But then Jules stepped forward and touched him tentatively on the arm. Randall turned.

"Thank you, Hurley, for all that you have done for me," he said. "Come, Jules. We must start at once. Ma'm'selle is somewhere up there in the mountains, and we must find her."

CHAPTER XLI

A Cry for Help

Jules, ever silent unless there were need for words, made no remark until they were almost at the entrance to the pass. But he knew that m'sieu had not spoken idly when he had said: "We must start at once." At once, with Randall, meant now; but all the same, Jules had different ideas.

"M'sieu," he said, as they were about to enter the pass, "do you mean that we go to-night, for to fin' mam'selle?"

"Yes," Dan replied. "At once. As soon as I have seen Buxton, to tell him about it."

"But, m'sieu weel listen un leetle moment to sommethang w'at Jules hav' to say? Non?"

"Of course, Jules. What is it?"

"Thees: Dat groun', heem not ver' hard when m'sieu Wadleigh go 'way avec dat breed-man. Heem not ver' hard now, jus' sam. You understand, m'sieu?"

"No. You mean that it would leave some sort of a trail? Of course. I had not thought of that."

"Non; you had no thought of dat, m'sieu. But, in de night, we not see dat trail. Een le matin, when de sun shine, we see heem plain. Non?"

"Yes, Jules. I understand you. We will wait until it is light before we start."

"Merci, m'sieu."

"Do you think that you will be able to find and to follow their trail, Jules?"

"For sure, m'sieu. Certainment. Pourquoi non? Jus' like you read a book. But, de hardes' part will be to fin' de trail, een de firs' place. An' so, m'sieu, when eet ees light, an' you wak' up, you fin' Jules gone already. But Jules be lookin' for dat trail. You see, m'sieu?"

"Yes."

"You comme then, jus' sam', m'sieu. Right out dere, where Jules point heem finger, now. You fin' Jules waitin' for you. Then we go on, bien-tot—queek. Non?"

"All right, Jules, I understand. You will be out there as soon as dawn begins to show, and by the time I get there you will have found the trail. Good. That is better, and I know you well enough to know that you can follow the trail once you have discovered it. But, wait a moment. Tell me what you think of it all."

"I do not know how to answer dat, m'sieu."

"Was it Lightfoot, do you think, who came here to-night to get Wadleigh?"

"No. I not know why I theenk not; but Jules theenk not, jus' sam'. But, Jules theenk othair theeng, m'sieu."

"What else?"

"I theenk dat Lightfoot send dat man, mabby-so. Lightfoot afraid comme heemself, mabby-so, et send othair man."

It was not long after daylight the following morning when Dan Randall found Jules waiting for him, half a mile north of the eastern end of

the pass. The faithful fellow stood up quickly when he saw Dan approaching, and announced as soon as he was near enough:

"I fin' dat trail, m'sieu. Heem not ver' plain, but I see him all right, jus' sam'. Dat snake Lightfoot, heem not mak' one part of eet. I know who mak' dat othair trail. Lightfoot hav' one frien', mabby-so."

They started on together without further converse, and several miles had been covered, and they had begun to ascend to higher levels along one of the mountain ravines, when Jules announced, without preface:

"I go across de pass las' nuit, m'sieu, to de stone maison by de lac. Yvonne, she gone from dere, m'sieu."

Dan stopped short in his tracks.

"Yvonne gone?" he exclaimed. "Where?"

"Je ne sais pas, m'sieu, unless she theenk she fin' ma'm'selle Joie. Yvonne feel ver' bad 'bout mam'selle Joie, m'sieu. I theenk she go to fin' her, mabby-so. Triton—heem m'sieu Taggart's homme, you know—heem not een dat fight las' nuit. Heem go back to de house. So, Yvonne, when she fin' dat Triton ees dere to tak' care of m'sieu Taggart, she jus' say notting, an' what you call, light out. But she tak' theengs to eat with her. So Jules theenk she go to fin' mam'selle. M'sieu weel remember that Yvonne hear all that old Pitou said about dat place under the black rock?"

"Yes."

"M'sieu theenk heem able to travel jus' leetle bit faster?" Jules asked.

"Three times faster than we have been going, Jules, if you will. Go just as fast as you like. I'll keep up with you."

It was a big promise, as Dan soon discovered, notwithstanding the fact that Jules had crossed the pass twice during the preceding night, and had had no sleep.

Up hill and down dale, over rocks and through woods, across ravines and athwart hog-back ridges, up precipitous cliff-sides, along precarious ledges, through thickets that were almost impenetrable, they made their way onward.

Sometimes the trail was plain indeed; at other times they nearly lost it utterly.

There were occasions when Jules lost precious moments seeking it; there were others when they ran with all speed along level places where the trail could be plainly followed.

They forded icy torrents of water that still were fed by the snows that lingered at higher points above them. They floundered through enormous drifts of snow that had not yet succumbed to the thaws; and so, at last, just before sundown, they crossed the backbone of the range, and stopped for a moment upon a flat space, whence there was an uninterrupted view in nearly all directions.

But, when Dan would have stood up boldly in order to look about him, Jules pulled him backward, below the highest point of rocks.

"We mighty clos' to dat Black Rock, m'sieu," he said. "Mabby dat Lightfoot be on de watch. Heem see us, then heem be warned. Non?"

"Is it so near as that?" Dan asked, eagerly.

"Oui, m'sieu."

"Then why don't we go ahead? What is the use of waiting here?"

"M'sieu hav' forgot, mabby, what dat captain say, down een Magicienne? Heem say dat m'sieu Wadleigh hav' keel three men, an' purty near keel somme othairs. Non? M'sieu Wadleigh know that. Mabby-so, now, eef you stan' up dere where he can see you, heem shoot you. Lightfoot, heem shoot Jules, mabby. Dat other man, heem shoot both of us. Non? We wait here until night. Non, m'sieu?"

"But, Jules, to be so near, and not to go to her!" Dan exclaimed.

"Eeet ees better to wait, m'sieu, than to be keeled, an' not go at all. An' mabby Yvonne dere, too, by now. I theenk so."

"You think that Yvonne has got there?"

"Oui, m'sieu. She start las' night. Dat road on de othair side, much better than on thees side. Yvonne geet dere queek. If we show ourselves now, we be shot, mabby-so. Then there ees nobody for to help ma'm'selle an' Yvonne. Then those bad men, an' dat Wadleigh, they do jus' what they like—eef m'sieu an' Jules are dead."

"You are right, Jules. I see it now."

"Purty soon we go on—when they no can see us." Jules seated himself upon the rocks and produced his pipe, having first taken note of the direction of the wind.

Then, just as night began to fall, they were brought to their feet with a sudden start.

A woman's voice rang shrilly out upon the increasing gloom, in one wild cry for help.

CHAPTER XLII

In the Nick of Time

Dan Randall could not have described, afterward, how he covered the space that intervened between him and the source of that call for help.

He and Jules had both recognized the voice of Joyce Maitland and the effect of it upon them, keyed-up as they were, was electric in its character.

Darkness had not yet fallen. The condition was that which we describe as "dusk."

Black Rock, well named, loomed directly in front of them, a hundred yards away. Between it, and them, there was a depression in the top of the mountain, which Nature, by some upheaval of the past, had filled with a jumble of sharp-edged stones of varying sizes. These were not easy to cross in haste, but both Dan and Jules forgot that fact when they heard the call for help.

They skimmed over the tops of those smaller rocks, practically side by side; now one of them would be a yard or so in advance, then the other —and so they leaped down at last upon a huge flat stone as level as a floor, directly under one side of the big black boulder, which was of the size of a small house.

There Jules darted on in advance of Dan.

They turned at a sharp angle around one end of the rock, and ran down a steep incline, which was, however, wide and smooth, and which wound around the rock in a curve as symmetrical as if the craft of an engineer had planned it. Like a spiral staircase without the steps, and much less steep, it proved, eventually, to be the pathway that old Pitou had described with almost his last breath.

The cry for help was not repeated.

More than likely, Joyce, after that one impulsive appeal, had remembered how futile it would be to call for help at a place so remote as Black Rock.

The two men ran lightly, almost noiselessly. In descending the winding path, they were very nearly side by side.

It was almost dark under the shadow of the rock, and the gloom became deeper as they descended; but soon Dan could see some sort of a glow ahead of him, and then Jules put out a hand and restrained him, and they came almost to a stop.

Dan would have shaken himself free and rushed onward had he not discovered at the same instant that they were directly upon the scene they sought.

A space suggestive of an amphitheatre of small dimensions was directly in front of them. A small building made of hodge-podge stones roughly piled together, and the chinks between them filled with earth, occupied the center of it. A wide doorway, through which a team of horses might have been driven with ease, stood open, and out of it a bright light gleamed.

A tableau of startling realities was there, too, plainly revealed to them by the light within the house. Their point of approach to it was such that nearly the whole interior of the room was visible to both.

By common consent they stopped, for they realized that their nearness was not suspected. They saw, too, that there was no immediate danger.

Apparently Ace Wadleigh and the man who had been his guide from Magician pass had only just arrived. It had not occurred to Dan that he and Jules had so nearly overtaken them. Jules had known it, but he had said nothing. He had strained himself and Dan, too, to their utmost efforts to catch up with the two men before Black Rock should be reached, but he had known at the last that it could not be done, so he had said nothing of their nearness.

Evidently Wadleigh and his companion had found Yvonne already there, without in the least expecting to see her; and that the fact of their coming had been as great a surprise to Yvonne, as her presence was to them, could not be doubted.

When Dan and Jules came upon the scene, Yvonne was standing over near one corner of the room, facing the wide-open doorway. She held a small automatic pistol in her right hand (it was one that Dan had given her long ago, and had taught her how to use). The muzzle of it was pointing directly at Ace Wadleigh, who had come to a stop a few paces inside the door—apparently when he had been in the act of rushing forward to seize her.

Probably he had intended no more than to throw

Yvonne out his way, for, beside her, and a little to the rear, upright, pale, courageous, with tightened lips and frightened eyes, stood Joyce. No doubt it had been the unheralded and totally unexpected appearance of Ace Wadleigh upon the scene which had compelled the startled cry from Joyce Maitland.

Just behind Wadleigh, nearer to the door, half crouching, and with one hand upon the haft of a knife that was thrust under a belt at his hips, was as villainous a looking specimen of the "breed"-Indian as could be imagined. Save for a nervous twitching of the fingers that clasped at the knife-hilt, he was as motionless as the others.

Over against the far wall of the room, directly opposite the open doorway, was a rude cot covered with weather-tanned skins of animals, and blankets, and upon the cot, where he had half raised himself by the support of one hand and arm, was Lightfoot.

He was drawn and haggard, cadaverous in appearance, and wasted almost to a skin-wrapped skeleton. But his eyes had lost nothing of their savage brilliancy, and they were gleaming strangely and furiously at Ace Wadleigh.

Such was the tableau.

Dan and Jules had come upon it at the very instant when it *was* a tableau. Within another instant, or a moment, or a minute or so, all would be action again. It was quite evident that the scene had been in the nature of a complete surprise to all concerned.

One may read much meaning from a scene like that.

An open doorway into another room of the small house was directly behind Joyce and Yvonne, as if they had just stepped through it together, to find themselves unexpectedly face to face with Wadleigh and his murderous-looking companion. Apparently Ace Wadleigh had thrown open the outer door and entered without any expectation of finding Joyce Maitland and Yvonne. Quite as evident was it that Lightfoot had not been looking for the arrival of Wadleigh.

Dan Randall, watching the scene for a time that seemed interminable, but which was actually less than half a dozen seconds, gathered himself for a leap forward, but at the same instant he felt the grip of Jules' hand upon his arm—and then Jules glided past him through the open doorway, and with a cat-like spring, gripped the wrist of the Indian that held the knife.

Wadleigh whirled about in this tracks, drawing as he did so; but not in time to do any damage with the weapon he would have used.

Dan's hands shot forward. One of them gripped Wadleigh's throat, the other seized the wrist of the hand that held the weapon, and bent it backward with a sudden wrench that snapped it like a pipe-stem. The weapon fell to the floor of the stone cabin. Wadleigh followed it, felled by a blow of the same clenched hand that had broken his wrist.

Jules raised himself from atop of the prostrate form of the Indian, at the same moment; the Indian stayed where he was, and Jules, half apologetically, said:

"Jules not do dat. Heem fall on hees own knife, m'sieu; but eet ees ver' good, jus' sam'."

Lightfoot fell back upon the cot, the fury gone out of him. He closed his eyes. A slow grimace, like a smile, distorted his thin lips. He lay very still.

Jules went nearer to Wadleigh, and stood over him in silence. Ace made no attempt to rise, nor to speak. His eyes were open, but he did not seem to see Jules; he kept them fixed upon Randall, whose back was turned to him.

Yvonne let fall her hand that held the weapon. Her eyes were riveted upon Dan, but mingled with the look of adoration in them, was expectancy, also. Dan was a god to her, in some ways. She expected great things of him in that moment. She was not disappointed.

Dan's eyes were only for Joyce. He looked toward her, and she met his gaze, steadily.

He discovered in their depths, something that he sought, even if that something was half concealed behind a gathering moisture.

He saw her lips part slightly, as if to speak, and he opened his arms and took a step toward her.

"Come to me, Joyce," he said. "I want you. Come."

She sprang forward with a glad cry. His arms enfolded her. She nestled against him. He held her the tighter, protectingly, with his face lost sight of in the profusion of her hair, which had fallen from its fastenings over her shoulders.

Yvonne clasped her hands together as one does when one prays, or gives devout thanks to God for a great blessing. Her lips moved in thankfulness.

The one prayer that had been her constant and earnest supplication, was answered. Her lord had found his love, and Yvonne was satisfied.

She dropped her eyes again, and they saw something else.

With a cry she threw herself forward, full upon the outstretched figure of Ace Wadleigh, whose weapon was discharged at the same instant, though harmlessly. Yvonne had discovered his stealthy act in time. In another instant he would have shot Dan, or Joyce, or both, to death. With one broken wrist, he still had one hand to use for evil deeds.

Then, when it was over, gentle little Yvonne hid her sweet face upon Jules' broad chest, and wept silently, with tears of infinite joy.

CHAPTER XLIII

The Ways of Transgressors

Lightfoot's light had gone out forever when he closed his eyes upon the certainty of the outcome of that strange scene. He was quite dead when Joyce, releasing herself from Dan's embrace, crossed hastily to the cot.

"He was good to me," she explained. "Not at first; but afterward. He was cruel to me, in the beginning, and there were times when I was filled with terror because of him. But all that passed very quickly.

"That day in the pass, after the storm, when I was trying to get to the pulpit, where I knew I would find fuel and food, I—I gave out very suddenly, I think. I lost consciousness; and when I came to myself I was in some sort of a grotto among the rocks. The front of it was sealed with snow. There was a fire, burning low, near the small opening. I could see beyond it, and knew that it was night.

"There was food beside me. It was not very choice, but I was ravenous. I ate; and I quenched my thirst with snow. I could not understand what had happened, but I knew that I had been saved, and that whoever had done me that service would return. The small fire kept out the worst

of the cold. I realized that I was safe for the moment, and I was content to wait.

"I ate again. Then I slept. How long, I do not know. The following day was far advanced when I awoke. Lightfoot, the Indian, whom I disliked and feared, was shaking my arm.

"He ordered me to rise. He made me eat of more food that he had brought to me. He would not tell me where he had been, but I knew. He had with him that small, black satchel that I gave to you, Dan, to hold your papers when you wished to carry them about with you. I knew that you kept it in your office. That fact told me that Lightfoot had been there, and had stolen it.

"Lightfoot thought the satchel was locked, and he did not dare, then, to break it open. He did not know about the hidden spring that releases the catch, which was the very thing that made you want it for your papers. When we started for this awful place, he made me carry it. He was laden with provisions that he had brought with him from Janver.

"Don't ask me about that journey to get here. It was horrible. How I lived to tell of it, I don't know.

"We floundered in the snow. We stumbled across barriers that seemed impassable. Often I fell from exhaustion. It was at such times that Lightfoot was brutal. Sometimes he pounded me, and beat me, and even kicked me into activity again, after the manner that Indians treat their own women. But, brutal as it was, it doubtless saved my life.

"We got here somehow—in the middle of the

night—years and years afterward, it seemed to me. While Lightfoot started a fire, I fell down in utter exhaustion upon that couch.

"When I awoke, Lightfoot was still sleeping—there, on the floor, before the fire-place, wrapped in blankets. He had thrown blankets over me, too.

"I arose, quietly. My act did not rouse him. I tiptoed to the door and opened it. The sun was shining, and there was a touch of warmth in the air. I recognized the smell of the Chinook wind, but up here it did not have much effect.

"Then—wait, Dan, please—I began to remember things. I remembered your satchel that I had been forced to carry, and to which I had clung because it was yours. There had been scarcely any weight to it, at all, still, I would have dropped it many times if it had not belonged to you.

"And then I remembered that I *had* dropped it, at the very last—at the moment when we had descended a steep and winding path and come in sight of this stone hut.

"I turned my eyes back into the room to see if Lightfoot had picked it up. It was not there, and, Indian though he was, he was still sleeping. I had not roused him. Probably his exhaustion had been even greater than my own, although he was stronger, and better able to withstand it.

"I remembered that I had been within sight of the house when I dropped the satchel, and, as it was night then, it could not be very far away. I went outside, I found the winding path down which we had come. I came upon the satchel in the middle of it.

"I touched the spring, Dan, and looked inside,

I saw what it contained. Instantly I realized the horror of permitting Lightfoot to know. I knew that he might awaken at any moment, and come in search of me. But there was no place to hide it, where he would not find it the moment he searched.

"Dan, I deliberately sat down in the snow, upon the spot where the satchel had been dropped, to obliterate the marks of it. No trace of it was left when I got up, and I hurried back here, bringing it with me. Lightfoot, wonder of wonders, was still sleeping. He must have been worn out, indeed, by his superhuman exertions in bringing me here.

"But he stirred as I approached, and I thrust the satchel under the blankets where I had been sleeping.

"He started to his feet. He saw the open door, which I had not had time to close.

" 'You been outside?' he demanded. I told him I had, and he went out without saying another word.

"I watched him and saw him follow the trail I had made. He bent forward, at the spot where I had seated myself in the snow, and appeared to examine it. Then he came back into the hut.

" 'What for you set?' he demanded. I shrugged my shoulders and did not answer.

" 'Where ees dat sachet?' he asked me, then. 'You no breeng him here las' night. Where you drop heem? Hey?'

"I shrugged my shoulders again without answering.

"He asked no more questions. He fixed the fire. He got things to eat, out of the pack he had

brought. He made me work, too, scowling so that I was frightened if I manifested any inclination to refuse. All the while I was in terror lest he should discover what was hidden under the blankets.

"To all of the questions I asked him, as to why he had brought me here, he made no answer. He rarely spoke at all, save in monosyllables; but his eyes followed me constantly, and gradually I became deathly afraid of him.

"Later, he went out, and I knew that he was searching for the satchel. I knew that he would not find it, and I dreaded the consequences. During his absence I found another hiding place for it.

"But he did not return during all of that day, or all of the night following; and it was far into the next day before I made up my mind that he did not mean to come back.

"I believed that I could find my way back to Janver, but it was too late to start that day. At night I barricaded the door, so that he would have to ask to get inside if he came back.

"But he did not come; and in the morning, as soon as it was light, I started out. The weather had moderated. It was not very cold. I believed that I could find my way out of my troubles. I felt that I would rather die on the mountain than to remain here an indefinite time, alone with Lightfoot.

"I found him, Dan. He had gone to some caché of his to bring more provisions. Returning, he had slipped and fallen. The burden he carried had fallen upon him. He had been two nights and a day in the open. It is a wonder how he lived through it at all.

"Both his legs and one of his arms were broken. He had tried to drag himself back to this place, but had not accomplished half the distance. Then he resigned himself to die. He was unconscious when I found him. But I knew that he lived.

"I remembered that I had seen an old toboggan-sled, here, in the cabin. Doubtless, one that had been used some time in the past to bring in supplies. Don't ask me how I got him here, at last, but I did it. It was three days after that before he came back to consciousness. In the meantime he raved, constantly, in his own dialect. But his broken bones rendered it impossible for him to leave the cot.

"Dan, dear, from that day to this one, I have cared for him, tended him, nursed him. It has been awful. Awful. But there was no other way. There were no remedies here. There has been nothing that I could do. He would not hear of my making an attempt to bring help. Oh, Dan, Dan, I am glad that you came. Wait, dear, I am almost done.

"Lightfoot, in his stolid fashion, appreciated what I did for him. He told me a great many things about Taggart and the others, and about Ace, that I did not know; and about a man called Gaffney, too.

"He warned me, also, to go away from here as soon as he was dead. He told me, all too plainly, that terrible things would happen to me if I remained. Taggart had ordered him to bring me here, if it could be done, and to hold me here until he could come here himself. Lightfoot was to fasten me in while he went to inform Taggart of

his success; and then (really I do not understand it all) Ben Taggart was to make use of me in some way to forward his own schemes against you and Ace.

"To-day—this morning—Lightfoot asked me to go away and leave him. To send help to him as soon as possible, but to go. I think he knew that he was dying. I was ready to start, and was at the door, when dear little Yvonne came. We had decided to wait until to-morrow, and then to go away together. When Lightfoot heard that, he smiled, and said:

" 'Ver' good. To-morrow, Lightfoot be dead.' He knew."

"Yes, he probably knew that he could not live another day," Dan replied. "But what of that other one? I never saw him before. Who is he?"

"I don't know," Joyce said. "I never saw him before, either."

"I know," Jules interjected. "Heem called Bad Pierre. Heem comme from up Edmonton country. Heem comme to Janver with dat bum—Gaffney—to guide heem. Dat how m'sieu Wadleigh know heem. . . . Non? Oui. Then, heem fall on hees own knife, when I grab hees wrist. Look, m'sieu," he added, addressing Dan, directly, "heem I see ver' many times with m'sieu Wadleigh, jus' about de time when de bum mak' de writings to look sam' as you write."

Ace Wadleigh, who was seated upon a stool in a far corner of the room with his broken wrist bound in splints of Jules' arrangement, and with Jules keeping watch over him, spoke up, in his

cool, leisurely, and insolent manner, while the ghost of an ironical smile hovered upon his lips:

"I can ease your minds in regard to Bad Pete," he said. "I see no reason why I should not do so. Jules is correct about his coming to Janver as Gaffney's guide. But Gaffney's money had given out. He could not pay Black Pete. So Black Pete decided that he would work for me, for some ready cash. That is all you need to know. I sent for him as soon as I could, after the thaw. I promised him a big reward if he would find out what had become of Joyce. He and Lightfoot had been as chummy as two Indians ever can be. I suppose Lightfoot must have told him about this place, or have had him here, sometime, perhaps. Anyhow, Peter found them both, and without letting them suspect that he had been here, came to me with the report. He said that Lightfoot was as good as dead, then, and that probably Joyce would be all alone by the time we got here."

Joyce took a step forward, toward him.

"What would have happened, Ace, if you had found me here alone, and unprotected?" she asked him, gazing steadily into his eyes.

For a moment he returned her gaze; then he dropped his own.

"What I intended to make happen, and what might have happened in such an event, does not matter, now," he replied, slowly. "You were not alone. The incident is closed. The only person I found here whose end I envy lies there." He pointed toward Lightfoot's body, on the cot. "He died a natural death."

CHAPTER XLIV

How One Man Could Hate

They buried the two bodies in one grave, made large enough to receive them side by side. Jules fashioned two rude crosses of wood to stand at their heads. Yvonne passed a solemn hour in the service of each one of them, counting her beads, and murmuring prayers for the repose of their souls. And surely none could have had a more earnest intercessor than she was.

That took place the following morning.

Two hours before noon they started upon their return, taking the way by which Yvonne had come, it being much shorter and easier.

But, before they started, Dan sent Jules and Yvonne and Joyce outside to wait for him, while he remained alone in the larger room of the cabin with Ace Wadleigh——with his one-time friend whom he had loved and trusted.

"Sit still, Ace," he said, calmly. "I am not going to take you back, and hand you over to justice. Justice will overtake you of its own accord, soon enough—unless you can think up a way to square yourself with it. So far as I am concerned, you are free to go wherever you please as soon as I have finished with what I have to say to you."

"I suppose I ought to thank you for your gen-

erosity," Wadleigh replied, with a half sneer. "I am not sure whether I want to, or not."

"You need not. I neither wish for thanks from you, nor deserve them. What I am doing now is done for the Boniface Wadleigh I used to know; not for the man you are now. But, more than anything else, I do it for my own sake."

"I hope you're not going to preach."

"No. Ace, I wonder if you knew who Gaffney really was?"

"Of course I knew. I found it out the night after he had finished signing those deeds with your name. He got drunker than usual that night, after it was over. If it had not been that he hated you, and feared you, too, for what he had done to you, he never would have committed those forgeries for me."

"So I supposed—after I had found out who he was," Dan remarked.

"When did *you* discover it?" Wadleigh asked. "I am quite willing to admit that I would have gone away from here, even now, after you have set me free, leaving you to believe, still, that you were a murderer. When did you discover that you were not one?"

"It was never a murder, Ace. I supposed that I had killed a man, and I fled. I had nothing to blame myself for—other than for the consequence of what I believed I had done. I had cause enough to kill him, God knows. I believed, even when I ran away, that I could stay where I was and be acquitted, if all the truth were known. But to do that meant a revelation of all the unhappy history of my sister, who had been his wife. I preferred

to do as I did. We will drop that part of the subject now."

"But, you haven't told me yet how and when you found out that Guy Fenney did not die by your hand. You couldn't have recognized him when you found him at the pulpit. You never knew him, did you? You never saw him until that night you thought you killed him, did you?"

"No."

"Well, how did you find it out? How did you discover that there was never even an indictment returned against you?"

"What? Not even that? No indictment against me?"

"You did *not* know *that,* did you? And I have told you the news. I'm sorry. However, it doesn't matter. If there had been an indictment, you could have had it quashed, now. Still——"

"Why, then, was I pursued, Ace? Why were officers sent after me, even into the Far North?"

"You weren't pursued. Officers were not sent after you. I only made you believe so. You might have remained Daniel R. Vanderveer all this time, with never a soul to object to it, or to ask you an unpleasant question, if you had chosen to do so—or if I had been decent enough toward you to put you wise. Great Scott, man, don't you suppose that the Law would have found you, if the Law had wanted you?"

"I do suppose so, now. I had not thought of it, in just that way."

"I hated you, Dan. I always hated you. I hate you now. I can't help it. It is inside of me. You had everything that I did not have, and that I

wanted with all my heart and soul. You had millions, in money. You had that phenomenal strength. You had that wonderful physique. You had kindness of heart, generosity of spirit, graciousness of manner, largeness of soul, bigness of intellect, unbounded capacity for whatever you undertook; and you had them all in bulk; a surfeit of them. . . . I had not one of them. I had smatterings of each, but the completion of none. So, I envied you; and, envying, hated you. That is what has brought me here, where I am now, an outlaw; the thing that you thought *you* were but which could not crush *your* spirit, even at that. Then, there was Joyce. Because of her I hated you ten thousand million times more than ever before. Oh, let me talk on, while I am in the humor for it. We may as well have a show-down, now; there will never be another opportunity. And I'm not talking because I hate you any the less, for I don't. More, if anything."

"Go on, then."

"I knew Joyce before you did. She was in Janver while you were up in the Great Slave country, and I was keeping you there with my lies. I wanted her. I loved her. She was getting used to me, and beginning to believe that she might love me some day, until you came down from the North, and found her in the snow beside her dead guide—and brought her in to Janver, where you found me again. That's all. If wishes could slay a man, you would wither up to nothingness right now, and disappear through that crack under the door with not so much as a memory left of you. Fine state of mind to be in, isn't it?"

"I cannot even imagine it, Ace."

"Of course you can't. That's another reason why I hate you. Now, suppose you reply to my question that I have asked you several times."

"What was it? I have forgotten."

"When did you discover that Guy Fenney was alive? Was it the similarity of the names that suggested it? Gaffney—Guy Fenney?"

"No. His own confession, written out at length, detailing the entire story of it all, even to the reasons which would have justified me if I had killed him, were in that belt that was strapped around his body over his undershirt, when you left him at Devil's Pulpit, to die. It told, also, that he was seeking me, to kill me."

"Oh. . . . I see. . . . Pity I didn't think to look for that sort of a thing on him. . . . Well, you'd better go now, hadn't you, if you want to make Bluerock before dark? That is, if you still intend to leave me here."

"Yes. I will go, now. There are provisions enough here, to last you for days to come, if you choose to remain. Jules has set the broken bones as well as a doctor could do it. I have put some money in that tobacco jar, over the fireplace. You can take it with you, or leave it there, as you prefer. I have thrown it aside. That is all. If you escape the red-coats, I wish you nothing but honest success for the future."

There were no good-byes uttered on either side. Dan swung around and left the cabin, closing the door after him.

Wadleigh watched him go, an odd and insolent smile upon his face as he did so.

CHAPTER XLV

When Dreams Come True

"What do you think of it, sweetheart?"

"It's just grand. That is the only word I can think of, Dan, dear; and that one doesn't half express it," Joyce replied, looking fondly at him, and bending forward in the saddle to pat the arched neck of her horse.

"Does look good, doesn't it?" Dan nodded his head in an emphatic gesture as he spoke.

They were at the top of the Ridge, exactly at the spot where Dan had halted to fasten on his snowshoes that night before the great storm. They had ridden out there to see the late afternoon train as it issued from Magician pass on its way to Janver.

The "It" referred to was the train itself. They had ridden out there to watch for its coming, every night for a week, and they found it just as wonderful this seventh night as it had been on the first occasion.

"We'll have the Black Gorge route running in thirty days," Dan told her a moment later. That was another remark that he had made to her every evening of the seven. But it was just as new, and just as interesting, and just as wonderful, as it had been with its first utterance; and her reply was the same.

"Won't that be fine? And I can ride through the gorge on the first train with you?"

"Of course, sweetheart. Come, now. Let's go back. Yvonne will be wondering if we are going to be late again."

June had come, and with it, their wedding day; also the day of the official opening of the Janver Cut-off over Magician pass. Both events were now seven days in the past.

In the Black Gorge to the west of Janver more than a thousand men were at work, driving one another for the premiums, and doing their utmost to win the praise of the man they worked for.

They could not get used to that new name. They liked Dan Randall best. Dan never saw nor heard the other one save on addressed envelopes, and when men journeyed out from the East to see him and to consult with him.

Of Wadleigh there had never been a sign since that parting with him at Black Rock, on the mountain. The police had not taken him. There was little doubt that he had made good use of the thousand dollars that Dan had left inside of the tobacco jar over the fireplace.

Taggart, paralyzed from the hips down, had, nevertheless, gone back to contracting, and was a big factor in the pushing of the Black Gorge branch of the Cut-off. Dan, when he received back the control of the M. & J. R. R., overlooked Taggart's and Crosby's past mistakes, and took them back on precisely the same conditions that they had enjoyed before that epoch-making directors' meeting. Cuthbert, evidently doubtful of

what might happen to him, had disappeared, none knew whither.

Buxton had been best man at the wedding. Also, he was general manager of the railroad, as well as the owner of a very comfortable block of stock, which Dan had insisted upon awarding to him.

When Joyce and Dan dismounted at the door of their home, Jules was there to take charge of their horses. Jules had never been quite so happy as he was in those days of summer.

Yvonne opened the door for them when they went up the short path to it.

Her sweet face seemed prettier than ever as she smiled, and courtesied, and then impulsively caught at their hands and kissed them. But Joyce caught the little woman in her arms, and kissed her on both cheeks, and Yvonne laughed aloud with pleasure, blushing with pride at the caress, for she knew that it was prompted by love.

Frequently, all four of them went over to the stone house at White Lake for a week-end, and then Jules would have a great time rollicking with his dogs, and manufacturing "things" with tools —for that was the pastime in which Jules found the greatest pleasure.

Dan had never needed all the papers concerning which he had been so careful to instruct Yvonne that night before the storm. The confession of Gaffney, otherwise Guy Fenney, had obviated that. But he kept them, "jus' sam'," as Jules would have put it.

They never spoke of Ace Wadleigh, although Dan caught himself thinking about the man, often,

wondering if he would ever turn up again, and when, and in what manner.

In their own snug living room, by themselves, with the door closed, Joyce went up to her stalwart husband and lifted her face for a caress, and he put his strong arms around her and held her close, and in silence.

Then Yvonne came to the door and summoned them to the evening meal.

THE END

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